

**Behold My Coming Servant:
Eight Encouragements
for the Discouraged**

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Psalter 257:1, 2, 4

Scripture: Isaiah 42

Psalter 123

Sermon Text: Isaiah 42:1–4

Psalter 292:1, 2

Psalter 292:3–5

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

—Isaiah 42:1–4

In Isaiah 40, the prophet Isaiah is tasked with bringing a message of forgiveness. In Isaiah 40:1–2 we read, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” The payment was made for Israel’s sins. In Isaiah 41, Isaiah takes the nations and their idols to task, confronting them as if in God’s courtroom. He shows them what they really are: a delusion, a vanishing wind. He says in Isaiah 41:29,

“Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion.”

The contrast in chapter 42 cannot be more stark. This time he points to the real help of man: “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.” This message came to the Israelites who were in exile because of sin. They were discouraged because of their circumstances. Maybe you are presently discouraged because of the circumstances of your life. There is little progress in your spiritual life. You have prodigal children. Our country is headed for moral self-destruction. You face unemployment. Family members don’t respond to the gospel. Trials test your faith. You are backslidden. There is much darkness and very little comfort. But God comes to you like He did to the Israelites with a message of comfort and encouragement. With the help of the Lord, I want to consider the theme “Behold My Coming Servant! Eight Encouragements for the Discouraged.” There are two thoughts to consider as we look to the coming Servant. First, we behold His character and find four encouragements. Second, we behold His commission and find four more specific encouragements. As we move through our text in Isaiah 42:1-4, we will see these eight encouragements coming to light as the Servant, Jesus Christ Himself, speaks to us from these well-known and cherished verses.

Behold His Character

Isaiah begins this chapter with the word, “Behold,” or, more literally, “Look here!” Behold my Servant! It seems almost a contradiction in terms. Behold the Servant? You would think Isaiah was pointing us to a king who was strong to deliver, but a servant? When you think of a servant, you think of someone with a mop in one hand and a pail of suds in the other. You think of someone who is at

the beck and call of his master. Who is this Servant? He is the Servant of the Lord. He is the Messiah! He is Jesus, the Advent Savior! He is the Deliverer who came to serve. This is really the glory of Christ! Philippians 2:7 states it this way: “[He] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.” He has come to encourage His people. Israel had failed in representing God to the nations around them; they had committed spiritual adultery with idols. They had *failure* stamped on their lives. You and I are not really any different; we have the same stamp on our lives. That’s why we are called to look upon and to believe upon this Servant always. Spurgeon says,

The darker all things else become, the more eagerly look for His appearing, whose coming is as a morning without clouds. When the lower lights are burning dim, behold the lamp above. Our great comfort is that *the Lord Jesus Christ is always to be beheld*...He is no delusion. Those who look upon this Servant will never be ashamed or disappointed.¹

Christ has come to succeed where you have failed! Christ as the coming Servant is not only the Servant of the Lord but also the Servant of sinners.

Isaiah highlights for us four characteristics that qualify Christ to be the Servant of the Lord. Each of these characteristics is also an encouragement.

Encouragement #1: Christ is the Strengthened Servant

Read in verse 1, “Behold my servant whom I uphold.” Literally, this would read, “Behold my servant, whom I grip or strengthen.” Imagine a toddler learning to walk. His mother or father grips him under the arms and teaches him how to walk, strengthening him and providing

1. Charles Spurgeon, “Christ’s Work no Failure,” Sermon on Isaiah 42:4, preached on January 30, 1887, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1945.htm>. Accessed November 23, 2009.

stability as the child totters around the house. This is the only way he can walk; he is utterly dependent on his parents for strength. As the Servant of the Lord, Christ was utterly dependent upon His Father for everything. He came as the Servant in His human nature. He was subject and answerable to God. He was strengthened by the Lord Himself. Derek Thomas notes, “At every point of his ministry Jesus was dependent upon the strengthening power of His heavenly Father, ministered to Him by the Holy Spirit. His work as the Redeemer—every aspect of it—was carried out in utter acquiescence to the will of Almighty God.”² Christ as the coming Servant is not powerless. He has divine strength as His aid. The idol gods are powerless and a delusion, but Christ is given power from God. He is no delusion. Jesus was upheld by His Father, and no power could overcome Him. Already at His birth, Christ is upheld by His Father. He is strengthened during the temptation in the wilderness. He is strengthened in Gethsemane. He is strengthened before Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod. He is strengthened upon Calvary. He is raised again from the dead. He is the strengthened Servant.

He has come to redeem captives like you and me from bondage. He is no weakling. He is no delusion. He was strengthened in order to uphold the weak. Are you weakened by storms and trials of life? Are you lacking strength of faith? Are you weakened because of failure? “Behold My strengthened Servant!” Are you wavering in your faith, not sure which way to turn between following the world or following Christ? “Behold My strengthened Servant!” Are you discouraged, wondering what the future holds for you and your family without a job? Here is cause for encouragement: “Behold My strengthened Servant!”

2. Derek Thomas, *Isaiah Simply Explained*, Welwyn Series of Commentaries (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1991), 278.

He is the Servant sent to minister to churches that have no servant to grip them and to strengthen them. Are you weary of this life, weak, and discouraged because of the battle? The strengthened Servant is coming again to take His people to Himself and to turn their weakness into eternal strength. When He comes again as the strengthened Servant, there will never be a moment of weakness again, never a moment of discouragement; there will only be eternal strength and joy. He has come for the weak and the trembling.

Are you attempting to support and strengthen yourself at this moment? Are you proudly asserting your independence from Christ? Then Christ cannot help you. He calls you to let your proud and stubborn independence go and to depend on Him alone. Are you willing to sacrifice a life of sin and independence for a life of dependence on Christ? Perhaps you are counting the cost and thinking, "But I cannot let go; I don't want to let go." This strengthened Servant has the power to crush the self-strengthening. Listen to Christ's own warning, from Luke 20:18: "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Will you fall upon Christ? Will you be broken and weak and rely upon Him for strength and salvation, or will you be ground to powder?

Encouragement #2: Christ is the Chosen Servant

In verse 1, Isaiah says, "Behold my Servant, mine elect." God does not simply choose anyone to be His Servant. By calling His only begotten Son to be His chosen Servant, God is actually saying that Christ is the excellent Servant. He is the second Adam to serve the purpose of redemption. He was chosen from before the foundation of the world. He is designated for the purpose of redeeming His

people from exile. He is sent to restore the weak and set the prisoners free.

The apostle Peter says that Christ “was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet. 1:20). Revelation 13:8 speaks of Christ as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. God’s wisdom has purposed to bring salvation through His Son, His chosen Servant. Behold My chosen Servant!

It’s as if God is laying out the resumé of Christ. Under the heading of qualifications, God puts “*chosen!*” He did not have to choose Christ. He is not obligated to deliver sinners. He could have simply left you to perish. But see the grace and the encouragement in this word “chosen.” Man has not chosen Him, but God has—He calls Him “my” chosen Servant. God has chosen Christ because you and I cannot help ourselves. God has chosen Christ so that He could choose sinners like you and me. Just like Israel, we have *failure* stamped all over our lives. We are full of disobedience, idolatry, sin, rebellion, proud independence, and self-reliance. Why would God choose people like us? It is because Christ is the chosen Servant! He saves and sanctifies sinners because of His chosen Servant. What a wonder, and what an encouragement that God has sent Christ! He could have left us to figure things out ourselves, but He says now, “Behold my chosen Servant!” Why would you choose any other deliverer? Self-chosen deliverers cannot help you; at the end of the day, they are a delusion. Only this chosen Servant of God is able to deliver you from all your sins and troubles. Where are you looking? Are you beholding the chosen Servant of God? Are you placing all your hope and anticipation in the chosen Servant of the Lord?

Encouragement #3: Christ is the Beloved Servant

Christ is not only strengthened and chosen, but He's also the Beloved Servant. Read again in verse 1, "Behold, My beloved Servant, My Servant in whom My soul delighteth." Parents, think of how you delight in your children. You see them grow and develop, moving from one stage of life to another. You delight in them when you see them start walking, saying words, going to school, getting jobs, starting to drive. You love them because of who they are and what they do. Likewise, God the Father takes profound delight in Christ—in who He is and what He does. This is seen at Jesus' baptism where the Spirit descends upon Him like a dove and His Father says, "This is my well-beloved Son." There is reciprocal delight in the relationship between Father and Son. The Father delights in the person and work of His Servant, and Christ as the Servant of the Lord delights in doing the will of the Lord (Ps. 40:7–8).

Christ is sent as the beloved Servant for the unlovable—those who are ugly and hateful because of sin. There is nothing in us that would make us beloved in the eyes of God. Paul says in Ephesians 1:6 that God has made us accepted in the Beloved. Here is the root of our encouragement: the beloved Servant. He is the ultimate object of the Father's affections and good pleasure. Don't you see the great lengths to which God has gone to redeem sinners? He sent His only beloved Son, so that whosoever would believe in Him would have everlasting life (John 3:16)! You and I have self-destructed because of sin and ensured our rejection, but God now sends a message of comfort! He has sent His beloved Servant to make sinners like you and me the objects of His affection. The unlovable delighted in! Hallelujah!

Do feel yourself the object of God's wrath and hatred because of sin in your life? Confess that sin, forsake it, and

find acceptance and affection through the beloved Servant of the Lord! Let sin go and cling to Christ, the beloved Servant. You will lose nothing, but gain everything.

Encouragement #4: Christ is the Anointed Servant

God says in verse 1, “I have put my spirit upon him.” Imagine if a military general ordered his troops into battle without equipment—no armor, no air support, and no weapons. They would never succeed without it. Likewise, God equipped Christ in His human nature for the redemptive work laid out for Him. Christ received the Spirit in fullness to equip Him for the mission of delivering His people. At His baptism, the Spirit came upon Him; throughout His life, the Spirit sustained Him and helped Him. The Servant of the Lord was fully equipped with the Spirit of God. In this prophecy, God was determined, “I will put my spirit upon him.” He sent His Servant, and He equipped His Servant with the Spirit’s presence and power. The Father was present with the Son through the Spirit; God was personally present with His Servant.

Behold the anointed Servant! Here is great cause for encouragement. This Advent season, you are directed to look to and believe in an anointed Savior, who possessed the Spirit in full measure so that poor lifeless sinners could be brought to life by the Spirit of God. Christ was strengthened and equipped for service. He experienced the Lord’s presence through the Holy Spirit so that sinners who have alienated themselves from God might experience the blessed presence of God in their lives. Spurgeon comments, “While the Holy Ghost abideth upon the great Servant of Jehovah we cannot know a fear. The anointing on the head will descend to the skirts of the garments.”³

3. Spurgeon, “Christ’s Work no Failure,” accessed November 24, 2009.

Even the weakest believer on the lower ends of the skirts of Christ will receive the Holy Spirit. Those who struggle with sin and fear they are being overcome have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. Those who are weak in faith have the Holy Spirit strengthening them for service. Just as Christ did not fail because He had the Spirit, so those who are in Christ cannot fail because they have the same Spirit. Did Christ not say before He left this earth, "I will send you another Comforter" (John 14:16)? He knows what we need, and He is never far from His people. He was anointed with the Spirit and He anoints His people with that same Spirit.

Christ as Servant is so full and so rich. He encourages His people despite sin and unbelief, despite backsliding. He bids you look to His qualifications to be the Servant of the Lord. Do you see your weakness? Look to the strengthened Servant! Do you recognize your state of rejecting Christ because of sin? Look to the chosen Servant! Do you see that you are cause for God's hatred because of sin? Look to the beloved Servant! Do you see your lack of power to live the Christian life and your lack of the presence of God? Look to the anointed Servant!

Behold His Commission

We wish to see four more encouragements that Christ's commission brings us. The Servant of the Lord is not only equipped, but He is also commissioned to complete a task. This was His great delight because it was His Father's will.

Encouragement #5: Jesus has come to set up judgment

Verse 1 says, "He will bring judgment unto the Gentiles."

Verse 3 says, "He will bring forth judgment unto truth."

Verse 4 says, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for

his law.” Why does Isaiah repeatedly use the word judgment? What encouragement is there in judgment?

The word judgment here is not used in a negative sense but in a positive sense, referring to God’s righteous government in the heart of men. Alec Motyer defines justice as “the Lord’s truth and the truth about the Lord.”⁴ Christ has come to make known this truth and to cause it to go out. He is both the agent of truth and the content of truth; He is the living embodiment of the gospel. He has come to set up His government in the hearts and lives of His people—both Jew and Gentile. He will succeed where Israel had failed. Israel was to be a light to the nations, but Christ came and proclaimed Himself “the Light of the world.” Hell and darkness were unleashed to prevent Christ’s mission, and yet He persevered in bringing judgment as we read in verse 4, “He shall not fail nor be discouraged.” His gospel cause shall never fail. He will not fail nor be discouraged in this task of setting up judgment.

We live in a world that is starving for this judgment, for the gospel. The gospel is twisted and distorted, and many are led astray. So often we are discouraged because we see truth languishing. Behold My Servant who will bring judgment unto truth. His mission in this regard is not one of failure, but of success. Office-bearers, don’t labor without hope, but behold the Servant of the Lord who will convert sinners and lead His people from darkness to light. You might be tired and exhausted from leading the congregation, but here is Christ, the Servant who will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set judgment in the earth. His gospel will go forth. He will persevere in the gospel ministry. He sits in heaven, but He works on earth. Maybe some of you are engaged in evangelistic ministry in the church

4. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 320.

and you cannot find fruit on your labors. Press on; be encouraged! Christ's ministry of judgment is turning sinners to Him. He will not let His Word that you speak fall to the ground. Parents, be encouraged for your children. Here is the Servant of the Lord who has been sent as the Deliverer. He will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set judgment in the hearts of all His people.

Encouragement #6: He comes in meekness

Verse 2 says, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." His mission is marked by meekness and humility, quiet gospel deeds and proclamation. There was no royal reception for Him with fireworks; He was born quietly and laid in a manger. There was no fanfare announcing His birth except for the heavenly host singing for the shepherds. He was not announced with royal pages traversing the land of Israel saying, "The King is born! The King is born!" Instead, He was forced to flee to Egypt. Christ did not stand on the rooftops shouting out; He quietly went about His Father's business. He healed the demoniac without fanfare. He gave sight to blind Bartimaeus without attracting much attention to Himself. He did not fight back when His captors took Him, bound Him, abused Him, and killed Him. He was not loud and brash. He was not known for His thundering rhetoric. And still today, Christ works quietly, arresting sinners and bringing them to terms with their sin, to terms with God.

This meekness of Jesus is the very foundation of our salvation. He lowered Himself to be born in the likeness of sinful flesh, in a stable, and humbled Himself to the death of the cross. He submitted to the will of the Father in every way. Our lack of meekness stands in stark contrast to that of Christ. But Christ has come to teach us meekness: "Learn of me that I am meek and lowly of heart"

(Matt. 11:29). Is this the Deliverer that you anticipate, or do you look for another? Are you looking for a man with polished rhetoric, intelligent communication, drawing attention to himself through his charisma? Are you looking for religion that is loud and brash and living for the experience, but devoid of quiet strength and meekness? Is Christ the Servant too lowly for you?

Encouragement #7: He undertakes a commission of comfort and care

Christ undertakes this commission of comfort and care for bruised reeds and smoking flax as we read in verse 4. The prophet uses a picture from nature of a bruised reed to show how Christ deals with broken and needy sinners. A bruised reed is weak, soft, and liable to break. Reeds blow back and forth with the wind. If a powerful wind would come they would snap and fall over—bruised. A bruised reed is a child of God who is sensible of sin and misery. They are bruised by sin and can't see light at the end of the tunnel. They are restless, looking about for help from another and find it in Christ but dare not reach out and grasp mercy.⁵ What use would Christ have for those who are weak and faltering and bruised? But Christ deals with reeds who are bent over because of sin. He works constantly and compassionately to set them up again. Christ deals with bruised reeds very tenderly. The Servant has come to deal gently with you, child of God. He comes for the brokenhearted and bruised.

The picture used here is of one who is oppressed and yet the Servant does not crush him but strengthens him, because He Himself is strengthened by divine power. Have you backslidden and despair of hope and mercy? Behold

5. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 4.

Christ and His tender care and comfort! Have you just come to knowledge of sin and misery, and are bruised and broken fresh from the world which has ravaged you? Know that Christ will continue His work to strengthen you. Has the Spirit convicted you afresh of sin and has it brought you very low? Christ deals tenderly with bruised reeds. He will not break you but will strengthen and sustain.

Isaiah also uses the picture of a light or a wick that is burning with a feeble flame from lack of oil and is about to expire. The flame can be put out very easily. Christ does not quench the smoking flax. When you blow out a candle, there is nothing but smoke with a quickly dying ember. Imagine working above that smoking wick. Smoke brings tears and is difficult to work in, yet Christ persists to bring forth light. He begins the work in those who are just coming to faith. Perhaps you are sputtering and smoking. Behold the Servant who deals tenderly with you, not snuffing you out completely but working to fan your faith to flame again. Perhaps you think you are backslidden beyond repair. You emit toxic smoke because of sin. Your light has gone out, and yet Christ maintains a spark in you. He doesn't let you grow cold completely, but He persists in fanning the flame of love and zeal. Matthew Henry states it this way: "Jesus Christ is very tender toward those that have true grace, though they are but weak in it, and accepts the willingness of the spirit, pardoning and passing by the weakness of the flesh."⁶

Christ has come to set up judgment in the earth; He has come in meekness; He deals gently and tenderly with those who are bruised and smoking; but He has also come to liberate.

6. Matthew Henry, *Commentary*, Isa. 42:3, Bibleworks 7.0.

Encouragement #8: He has also come to liberate

Jumping ahead to verse 7, we read that He has come “to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.” Christ is the liberating Servant. One of the primary purposes of Christ’s coming was to liberate spiritual captives. Isaiah is not speaking primarily of liberation from exile or from political oppression, though God would indeed deliver Israel from that. Isaiah is speaking primarily of spiritual liberation. He is speaking of spiritual blindness being reversed. Our minds and hearts have perverted the knowledge of God, but Christ is the great Liberator. We’ve been blinded by sin from the beginning, Christ has come to undo this. We have bound ourselves in prison, but Christ has come to release sinners and set them free by His truth.

What hope and what perspective Christ offers us this Advent season! People engaged in church ministries are often discouraged because sin has bound people and blinded them to the realities of the gospel. But be encouraged to present Christ to them—present the Servant to them! He has come to open blind eyes and to set the prisoners free. His gospel light shines brightly so that those in the deepest and darkest dungeon of sin can be set free. Lives and hearts embroiled in the problems of life can be restored by the gospel by this Servant who will not faint or be discouraged.

“Behold My servant!” Behold His encouraging person and His encouraging work! Behold Him in His first coming, and behold Him for His second coming! Behold Him for acceptance and behold Him for holiness. He is sufficient as the Servant of the Lord and, this Advent season, He demonstrates that He is willing to be the Servant of sinners. Amen.