

# Prelude: A Servant Song

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. My name is Alex. It's good to be back here with you.

And this time around, I've brought my lovely wife as well, Linda. If you'll please stand and see you. We also bring greetings to you from Wesley Methodist Church in Penang.

Where I serve the Young Adults Ministry. I also want to thank Pastor Brian for the opportunity to serve you this morning. So, will you please keep your Bibles open to our passage.

And also, there's an outline in your bulletin as well. How about we begin our time together by praying. Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is to gather together this morning to glorify you.

And as we sit under your word, will you please speak to us and teach us to give you glory and to look to Jesus.

[ 1 : 20 ] In his name we pray. Amen. Friends, it's December already. So, the year is coming to a close.

And what a year it has been, hasn't it? If you ask most Malaysians, perhaps the most significant event this year is the change in government.

Do you remember your shock, your emotions, your hopefulness for the future? Dr. Mahathir announced that the rule of law will be restored.

It seems that justice will finally be done. Some big names have already been investigated. And wrongdoings have been filed in court.

Another kind of justice is also at work. Where the poor and the oppressed are being looked after. GST was removed for three months.

[ 2 : 31 ] Minimum wage has increased. And petrol will soon be subsidized for the right people. Justice for the poor is also being done.

But are these enough? Is there complete justice yet? Apparently not yet. In terms of wrongdoing, In the 1MDB case, J-Lo still hasn't been caught.

And there is still no news on Pastor Raymond Kaur and Pastor Joshua Hilmi and his wife Ruth. In terms of oppression, the ban on child marriages is not yet in place.

And the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, they are still not protected. Justice isn't completely done yet.

There are other places where we long for justice. Did you hear about the Asia Bibi case? She's a Christian from Pakistan.

[ 3 : 48 ] And several years ago, she was falsely charged with blasphemy against Islam. The courts sentenced her to death.

But two months ago, the Supreme Court overturned the decision and declared her innocent. But the government continues to detain her and she is not permitted to leave the country.

We long for justice for Asia Bibi. And we also long for justice for the heavily persecuted church in China and many parts of the world.

Perhaps some of us also long for justice even in our very own lives. Perhaps, maybe you have a manager that practices favoritism or perhaps a lecturer who is particularly unreasonable in marking or perhaps you are treated badly by our team members at work and they get away with it.

So, how do we get justice there? Will we even come close to getting it? Who will help us?

[ 5 : 14 ] Who will bring the justice that we desperately long for? Our passage this morning gives us God's answer to our longing for justice.

So, let's have a closer look. Isaiah 42 begins with God introducing His servant. Look with me at verse 1.

Verse 1 of Isaiah 42. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. So, who is this servant? Well, this servant seems to be one that's very close to God and very special to Him. God calls him my servant, my chosen one.

[ 6 : 19 ] So, this servant belongs to God. He's close to Him. God also says that He upholds or supports this servant.

and He delights in Him. We get a sense that God is on the same side as the servant, upholding Him, supporting Him.

And God is thoroughly delighted and pleased with this servant. This servant is special, very special to God.

And for this special servant, God gives a special task. God says He will put His Spirit on His servant so that the servant will bring justice to the nations.

Now, can I invite you to stop and think what a big task this is? It's hard enough to get justice where we study, where we work, or the country we live in.

[ 7 : 28 ] So how is this servant supposed to bring justice to the nations? To bring justice on an international scale? And what's even more surprising is the way this servant will bring about that justice.

You look with me at verse 2 to 4 and look at the way the servant will bring about justice. Verse 2 He will not shout or cry out or raise His voice in the streets.

A bruised reed He will not break and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out. In faithfulness He will bring forth justice.

He will not falter or be discouraged. Till He establishes justice on earth, in His teachings the islands will put their hope.

Can you see the surprising way God's servant brings justice? In verse 2 and 3 He will not do it with any big announcements.

[ 8 : 40 ] No shouting, no crying out, no raising voices. So it means no demonstrations on the streets of KL. He will not do it with violence or with casualties.

A bruised reeds He will not break. And the tiny little candlelight will not be blown out.

Instead, in verse 3 and 4, He will bring forth justice faithfully faithfully, without faltering, without being discouraged.

Here, we get a sense of how difficult the servant's task is. Because there's a need for the servant to be faithful, to persevere, to not falter or be discouraged, until his big task is complete.

In other words, the servant will humbly, peacefully, but faithfully bring justice on earth. And at the end of verse 4, when his task is complete, the servant's justice will be a justice so attractive that even islands, lands far away, will put their hope in the servant's teaching.

[ 10 : 15 ] To me, if someone is going to bring an international, attractive justice like this, then I would like to know, who is this servant?

when do I vote for him? What political party does he belong to? Well, in the surrounding context, who is this servant?

One possibility is the nation of Israel. In the previous chapter, chapter 41, Israel is described as God's servant, chosen, whom God will uphold.

But then in the second half of chapter 42, Israel seems to be ruled out, because Israel is spiritually blind and deaf to their own sin.

So perhaps Israel is not this servant. A more likely possibility, as found in the earlier chapters, chapter 11, and there the shoot from the stump of Jesse will have the spirit rest on him.

[ 11 : 32 ] And this Davidic king will judge with righteousness and justice in favour of those spiritually poor and needy, and he will slay the wicked.

So who is this servant? Perhaps you already have someone in mind, your alarm bells are ringing, but God has more to say about this servant.

Look at me at verse 5 to 7. Verse 5, this is what God the Lord says, the creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it.

I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

In this section, friends, we see God's authority introduced, we see God's appointing the servant, and we see the servant's task clarified.

[13:10] In verse 5, God is introduced as creator of heaven and earth and as the giver of life to all peoples of the earth.

And then in verse 6 and 7, this creator God speaks directly to his servant. I look at what God says, I, the Lord, in my righteousness, have called you or appointed you.

And then God commits, he commits to strengthening his servant by holding his hand and to keep him. And what's the purpose of God's appointing and strengthening the servant?

In verse 6, it's so that the servant becomes a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles. Notice the scope of the servant's task.

It's not just for the people of Israel. The servant's task also extends to the Gentiles, which means it extends to all nations.

[14:27] And that task is clarified in verse 7, to open blind eyes and to release prisoners from dark prisons.

Now, I think it's worth thinking through that last bit a bit more. Was Israel stuck in prison? Which is why the servant needed to release them?

And are the Gentiles, the nations, are they stuck in prison as well? Which is why the servant needs to release them too? If you were Israel, the first listeners of this verse, then yes, you would be like prisoners, trapped in a jail overseas, with no appeals in court, and with no escape.

You are stuck in prison, like Asia Bibi in Pakistan, like the Rohingyas in West Malaysia. That's what Israel was like.

Stuck in prison, exiled as prisoners, with no appeals in court, with no escape. And the difference is, Israel was actually guilty, guilty for their sin and disobedience against God, and God imprisoned Israel for it.

[16:12] But now, out of God's grace, Israel's jail sentence will come to an end. God says in Isaiah 40 that her hard service has been completed, her sins has been paid for, and she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

So God will not allow Israel to be imprisoned any further. Now, God sends his servant who will bring this aspect of justice to be released by releasing prisoners, by releasing sinners, whose due punishment is complete.

And this release is not just for Israel alone. The Gentiles, the nations, including we ourselves, have the same problem of sin and disobedience against God.

so we too are deserving of punishment unless the servant releases us also. The question is, will the servant really do this?

Will the servant really bring justice and release us sinners? in response, God answers with a big yes.

[17:49] Yes. Look with me at verse 8 and 9. Verse 8, I am the Lord. That is my name.

I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place and new things I declare before they spring into being I announce them to you.

So the Lord God will do what idols can never ever do. He announces beforehand what's about to happen.

He's done it before previously. The former things that he announced beforehand they have already taken place. So now he announces his servant's justice and the release of prisoners and the Lord God will make it happen so that glory and praise belongs to him alone and to no one else.

God's servant will bring justice by releasing prisoners from completed punishment and God will make it happen for his glory.

[19:19] prayer in my church in Penang we too have prayer meetings it's every Saturday morning and every first Wednesday of the month.

Now if you attend them often enough this year you will notice the change. Before the month of May people were desperately praying for God to have mercy on Malaysia and for justice in our country. Many were confident that God is sovereign only he is powerful to do it. But the question in people's minds are would God do it?

we didn't know beforehand. Then the general elections came in May and since then the subject and the tone of our church prayer items have changed significantly.

The words praise and glory kept being repeated and directed towards God. Prayers for justice are now filled with a genuine hopefulness and there is now a sense of freedom or release from the old and hope for the new.

[ 21 : 03 ] So at our prayer meetings now we praise and glorify God because in our longing for justice and freedom God has made it happen in Malaysia for the praise and the glory that he alone deserves.

So how much more praise then if God tells us beforehand and then makes it happen? How much more glory then if God brings justice not just at a national level but at an international level? And how much more glory then if God's servant brings freedom and release to sinners to a world in desperate need?

Which is why in the next section Isaiah invites readers to give God glory? Look with me in verse 10 to verse 12 there we will see there are eight different ways of giving God glory.

Two of them in verse 10 sing to the Lord a new song his praise from the ends of the earth. Four more ways to give God glory.

[ 22 : 40 ] Verse 11 raise voices rejoice sing for joy shout out.

And then two more ways in verse 12 give glory proclaim his praise. We also see who Isaiah invites to give God glory.

See where they are from. Verse 10 they are from the ends of the earth all from the sea and all from the islands. In verse 12 those from the wilderness from the towns and settlements of Kedar deserts of modern day Jordan and then also those from the mountains of Jordan the people of Selah verse 12 even those from the islands.

So in this section here Isaiah invites all creatures all peoples from all places to give God all glory in all ways because God's servant will bring justice.

One aspect of that justice is for the oppressed for the releasing of prisoners but in verse 13 the second aspect of justice is against God's enemies.

[ 24 : 20 ] Look with me at verse 13. Verse 13 The Lord will march out like a champion like a warrior he will stir up his zeal with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.

Do you notice God's zeal his energy his enthusiasm it says here he's like a champion like a warrior stirring up zeal raising the battle cry and do you know what this reminds me of it reminds me of the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team in that team the captain leads 14 other players in a haka Maori dance with angry faces with aggressive dance moves and with fierce eyes staring down the opposing rugby team here God is staring down his enemies and he's ready to go after them look what he says in verse 14 and 15 verse 14 for a long time

I've kept silent and I've been quiet and held myself back but now like a woman in childbirth I cry out I gasp and pant I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation I will turn their rivers into islands and dry up the pools can you see here God is saying enough is enough no more waiting I am going to the delivery room no I am going after my enemies and here's the destruction that I will carry out who exactly is God going after who are these enemies well in the immediate context of

Isaiah the enemies are the Babylonians who have held God's people Israel captive but in a wider context if sinners from all nations are also imprisoned in desperate need of release then God is also staring down on his worldwide enemies Satan sin and death and justice in terms of wrongdoing by enemies will be done and when God is done against his enemies he will then lead his people out of their darkness out of their prison look with me at verse 16 verse 16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known along unfamiliar paths

I will guide them I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth these are the things I will do for them I will not forsake them so God will not forsake his people those who trust in him those who look to his servant for justice and freedom but what about those who don't trust him or his servant what about those who trust in idols in other things that is not the one true God and the warning is in verse 17 but those who trust in idols who say to images you are my gods you are our gods will be turned back in utter shame from this passage we've seen how

[ 29 : 03 ] God's servant will bring worldwide justice by releasing sinners and going against his enemies a God himself will make it happen by strengthening this servant to humbly peacefully but faithfully complete his task and yet we still haven't properly identified who this servant is there are other passages in Isaiah that will give us more clues like in chapters 49 chapter 50 and chapter 52 and 3 and these are known by some as the servant songs but ever since then our people have

been waiting looking out for this servant of

God and looking forward to his justice but it wasn't until about five to six hundred years later that people like Mary Zechariah and Simeon they began to get a glimpse of who this servant is and you will get to hear these glimpses over the next few weeks when Pastor Brian takes you through the songs in Luke 1 and 2 but I want to turn your attention to the book of Matthew there the gospel writer clearly identifies for us who this servant is also can you turn in your Bibles turn your Bibles to Matthew chapter 12 verse 15 to 21 so flip to

Matthew 12 Matthew 12 verse 15 to 21 it says there aware of this Jesus Jesus withdrew from that place a large crowd followed him and he healed all who were ill he warned them not to tell others about him this was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah here here is my servant whom I have chosen the one I love in whom I delight I will put my spirit on him and he will proclaim justice to the nations he will not quarrel or cry out no one will hear his voice in the streets a bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out till he has brought justice through to victory in his name the nations will put their hope do you see what's happening here Jesus is healing all who were ill but he warns them don't tell others about me as he releases people from illness and the effects of sin he does it quietly without any big announcements in verse 14 just the one verse before that the Pharisees are now plotting how to kill him but Jesus withdraws from there to faithfully proclaim justice until the Pharisees succeed in killing him at the cross so to Matthew the fact is undeniable God's servant has come Jesus fulfills what was spoken to the prophet Isaiah Jesus is a long promise is God's long promised servant special to God and with a special task of bringing justice to the nations how you see with his death on the cross Jesus brings justice by releasing prisoners from all nations from their due punishment which he himself has completely absorbed and then with his resurrection from the dead Jesus brings justice by defeating the power of Satan the power of sin and the power of death friends Jesus God's servant indeed has come and God indeed has made it happen he announced it beforehand and it has now taken place what else can we do but give God glory I will make a confession before you every

[ 34 : 47 ] Christmas I get a tiny bit annoyed I get a tiny bit annoyed when people wish me Merry Christmas Christmas and there I say I also get annoyed when they say to me blessed Christmas I get annoyed because to me it feels like a happy birthday greeting it feels like it's directed to me only to the effect of hoping that I'll have a good holiday that I'll enjoy a happy day off the reason I get annoyed is because in this season of celebrating Jesus birth I get wished happy birthday instead not Jesus the emphasis and the attention seems misplaced the greeting is directed to me instead of

God and it doesn't help that there is commercialization of Christmas with decorations and shopping sales so perhaps in light of this passage perhaps we can start a different tradition perhaps a tradition that is similar to the Easter greeting Christ is risen he is risen indeed perhaps a Christmas greeting that goes like this the servant has come give God glory glory the servant has come give God glory perhaps it might work because the emphasis and the attention is not directed at me but directed at

Jesus and directed to God and then perhaps it might work because in it there is an invitation to the people sitting around you now to praise God because Jesus the servant whom God announced beforehand indeed has come so what else can we do but give God glory the servant has come give God glory friends another thing we must do is to look and to trust Jesus for justice we live in a period between Jesus first coming and second coming in his first coming Jesus has brought a justice that can release sinners from

God's punishment because Jesus himself completely absorbed that punishment through his death on the cross this justice is found in the gospel message that has reached the nations even here in Kuching and in Penang and this justice is for those who trust in God and in his servant Jesus but for those who don't trust in God and in his servant the warning is still applicable they'll be turned back in utter shame under God's punishment treated as God's enemies because of the first coming trust in Jesus justice for justice for the justice of release and freedom from punishment and as we wait for the second coming we recognize that his justice over all the nations has not quite yet been fully established.

Are we still long for worldwide justice? Justice for Asia Bibi? Justice for China's persecuted Christians?

[ 39 : 29 ] Justice against Satan, sin and death? But on a basis of Christ's resurrection from the dead we can be confident that he now has the power authority and zeal to complete his task.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul writes verse 20 but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. We go down to verse 23 Christ the first fruits then when he comes those who belong to him then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion authority and power for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Our friends Jesus has risen and he has power authority and zeal to destroy all his enemies and finally death.

and so while we wait for Christ's second coming for that worldwide justice to surely be established we are to look to Jesus who alone can secure that justice.

[ 41 : 15 ] In our strive for justice in Malaysia our greatest hope is not in the Prime Minister our greatest hope is not the next Prime Minister not the new government no matter how well they succeed.

Friends our greatest hope for justice is Jesus so look to him and also friends while we suffer injustice in our different context a manager who practices favoritism an unreasonable lecturer or team members who treat you badly we must seek possible avenues for correction yes but we are also to suffer these injustices by looking to Jesus the servant because he modeled for us what it was like to suffer the injustice of his death humbly peacefully but faithfully and Peter says in 1 Peter 2 that as he suffered Jesus endured and entrusted himself to God who judges justly so as we suffer our own injustices look to Jesus example endure and entrust yourself to God who will ultimately vindicate our friends we've seen from Isaiah 42 God's promise of a servant who will bring worldwide justice that releases sinners from God's due punishment and a servant's justice that is against Satan sin and death and the fact is undeniable God's servant indeed has come Jesus fulfills this promise what else can we do but give God glory so this Christmas will you invite one another to praise God and say the servant has come give God glory and as you wait for Jesus second coming will you trust in him to receive the justice of release from God's punishment and in the present worldwide and personal injustices will you look to Jesus our greatest hope for justice and our example to endure and entrust ourselves to God who judges justly friends let's pray together we I we