

I Am Your God

Lesson Text: Isaiah 41:8-10, 17-20

Background Scripture: Isaiah 41:1-42:9

Devotional Reading: 1 Peter 3:12

Isaiah 41:8-10, 17-20

⁸ *“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. ¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

¹⁷ *“The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. ¹⁸ I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. ¹⁹ I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set junipers in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, ²⁰ so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this,*

Isaiah 42:1-4, 9

“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. ² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

⁹ *See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”*

LESSON AIMS

- **Facts:** to show that the God of the Bible, who reveals Himself to us and offers us comfort, is truly personal.
- **Principle:** to teach that the God of the Bible is the God who comforts us.
- **Application:** to know that when we need comfort, we can go to our God; He will never fail us.

INTRODUCTION

Unneeded Gifts

Buying gifts for friends and family can be an unwelcome chore. Why is this? At least one reason is that we dislike giving a gift that may end up being unappreciated. When a gift fails to please its recipient, we feel we have wasted our time, money, and effort. Worse, we may feel that rejection of a gift is, in a small way, a rejection of us.

I have a tongue-in-cheek personal rule for this: if I do not know what to get someone, I get something I like. That way, at least one person will like the gift! I learned this as a youngster from my friend Mike. He did not know what to get his sister for Christmas one year, so he gave her a left-handed baseball mitt he really liked. It helped that Mike was the only leftie in his family and that his sister didn't play baseball. He knew that at least one person would use that gift! On the other side, we have all received unneeded gifts. A man might get another tie when he already has dozens. A woman might receive another kitchen gadget to add to her drawerful.

The Bible teaches that our God is a giving God, and His gifts are never unneeded. They might be unwanted or underappreciated, but not unneeded. God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). If we do not want or appreciate what God gives us, the problem lies with us, not with the gift. In today's lesson, Isaiah presents this giving side of God in a twofold way. He sees God as the one who gives us a role, a task; in this, God gives purpose to our lives. Isaiah also sees God as the one who gives us the resources to fulfill our roles. He is both sustainer and provider for those who serve Him. He is our Lord and Master, the one whom we serve. But He is also our source, the rock that anchors and supports us (Psalm 18:2).

LESSON BACKGROUND Time: about 700 – 695 B.C. **Place:** Jerusalem

The Hebrew prophets were a diverse group. Some, like Amos, had no professional credentials—he was a herds-man and a gatherer of sycamore fruit (Amos 7:14,15). Others, like Isaiah, may have been of noble birth. Isaiah's, ministry lasted some fifty years,' preaching during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Tradition says he was sawed in half by King Manasseh (cf. Heb. 11:37).

While all prophets spoke the word of God, some did more than their share of foretelling the future. This included both the immediate future and events that would relate to the coming Savior.

Not only did Isaiah denounce the sins of his day; he also foresaw the return of the Jews from Babylon, the suffering of the Messiah (Isa. 53), and the promise of “new heavens and new earth” (65:17).

While the prophets were to preach against the evils of their nation, they were also called upon to proclaim hope to those who were suffering. Hence, Isaiah continued to offer hope to those who would eventually return from the captivity.

THE CALL OF THE LORD (Isaiah 41:8,9) There are three names in this verse, each accompanied by a descriptive tag. But all apply to the people of Israel, Isaiah's people. Isaiah uses the national name Israel, the name given to Jacob after his wrestling experience (Genesis 32:28). The word Israel means “God prevails.” This reminds us that the function of the nation of Israel was to be God's servant, empowered to do His will.

The people of Israel have been given a covenant with God and are intended to be a “*light for the Gentiles*” (Isaiah 42:6). This is God's purpose in choosing Israel as His people. God is not working to fulfill national ambitions or maintain traditions. Rather, He is protecting and enabling Israel so that it can be His servant, His instrument for making himself known to all peoples (see 49:6). For this reason, Isaiah 40–66 has frequent references to the Lord's “*servant*” (see 41:9; 49:3). In its ultimate sense, however, this concept is expanded and fulfilled not by the nation of Israel, but by the Messiah, Jesus (see Matthew 12:18).

Isaiah also describes his people as Jacob whom I have chosen. Genesis tells how Jacob was chosen over his older brother, Esau, to be the father of the nation of Israel. Likewise, the nation that came from Jacob did not earn a position of favor based on merit. Rather, they had been selected by the Lord out of all the nations to be an instrument for fulfilling God's plan for human redemption.

Finally, the people are called the seed of Abraham. This is a reminder of their heritage. The relationship between the Lord and Israel is not a business partnership or military alliance entered into by equals by mutual agreement. It is instead based on the plan, purpose, and affection of the sovereign God.

1. Where did the name "Israel" originate (Isaiah 41:8)?

God's selection of Israel now receives fuller explanation. Israel has been chosen out of the vast field of all nations, for God has surveyed the ends of the earth. Furthermore, this people-group has been chosen after consideration of the finest earth has to offer: its chief men.

The words of God reinforce what is said in the previous verse: Israel was chosen by the Lord to serve Him. Now, however, a new detail is added, for God promises not to cast thee away. God's choice of Israel is not a short-term appointment. There are no qualifiers here. God simply promises never to abandon His commitment to Israel.

Although it is not stated here, we know from history that there is a good reason for this: the Messiah is to be ushered into the world through Israel.

What Do You Think?

What responsibilities did you become aware of when you realized that God wanted you to do something?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding Christian service
- Regarding church involvement
- Regarding personal holiness

Called To Be Servants

The world has a long history of looking down on those who serve others. The phrase indentured servant describes a type of servanthood that goes back at least to Old Testament times. Such a servant was, in effect, a slave to the one to whom a debt was owed. The kind of slavery that was known in the Western world from the 1600s to the 1800s (and is still found in many parts of the world today) is especially notorious.

Jesus changed the outlook on servanthood when He came as God's ultimate servant. As a result, there are many organizations today that promote servanthood in the name of Christ. The focus may range from disaster relief to the problems brought on by poverty, warfare, or disease in many regions of the world. Other agencies offer humanitarian aid from a secular concern for education, sanitation, and medical advancement.

Our impetus for servanthood as Christians originates with God and His example. Through His supreme act of service—the incarnation of His Son—He also calls us to be servants to the world (Mark 9:35). —Charles R. Boatman

2. *How did God go about His selection of Israel (v. 9)?*

THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD (Isaiah 41:10)

In spite of the fact that the people of Israel were facing an uncertain future, the Lord declared, *"So do not fear ...be not dismayed."* The sense of dismay here is to look around with anxiousness. They are not to live in dread of the future, for they have the Lord, the master of the universe, as their God.

Furthermore, Israel is promised that God will strengthen, help, and uphold them. God vows not to abandon them or to stand back and watch them flounder. God is present in their affairs. This is not an arbitrary display of power, however. It is the righteousness of God that drives these promises.

Hearing the words "Do not fear" is a reminder of the many times when Jesus spoke similarly during His ministry. He often reassured others with similar words (Matt. 10:28, 31; Luke 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32; John 12:15).

Isaiah's readers could take solace in the command not to be afraid because the Lord had said, *"I am with you"* (Isa. 41:10). While God does not always deliver us from our troubles, He does promise to be with us through them. Among the last words Christ spoke to His disciples were these: *"And surely I am with you always, to the end of the very age."* (Matt. 28:20).

3. *What other Scriptures come to mind when we read, "Do not fear" (v. 10)?*

What Do You Think? What are some things you fear that you need to turn over to the Lord? How will you do that?
Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding medical issues
- Regarding finances
- Regarding relationships

THE HAND OF THE LORD (Isaiah 41:17-20)

People have always faced water shortages. If weather patterns do not produce regular rain in a timely manner, a drought is the result. This is more of a problem in cultures that are not technologically advanced. Sometimes deep wells may be the only source of water.

In times of extreme drought, it is not uncommon (even today) for people to walk miles each day for water. This is a life-and-death situation. Israel is assured that the Lord will hear them in a time of need. The people may be in distress, but they are not abandoned (compare Deuteronomy 8:15).

In verse 18 of today's lesson Isaiah pictures God's abundant provision of water in a paradoxical way. We usually expect rivers in the valleys but fountains (meaning "springs") in the mountains, not the other way around. We don't expect open pools of water in the desert wilderness, and we anticipate no water sources at all in the dry land just by definition. God's provisions are surprising and generous. As He provides the needy with more water than they can use, His grace to Israel is beyond what they deserve or expect. So it is with God's people today.

4. How can we be assured that God provides in our times of need (vs. 17,18)?

What Do You Think? What was a time when God has provided spiritual water in “a dry place” for you?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- During a severe illness
- During a family crisis
- When enticed by sin

The wilderness and desert regions of the Middle East are quite bleak compared to what many people experience in most populated regions of America. The wilderness there is known as a barren region (see Leviticus 16:22) and is generally defined by a lack of trees. Yet the Lord promises to plant the wilderness with a variety of prized trees. We are not sure of the exact identification of all of these trees, so there are differences in some of the translations of this verse. We can see two groups, though.

First is the grouping cedar, shittah (probably the acacia), myrtle, and oil tree (probably the olive tree). These are sometimes found in the wild, but often cultivated for wood, fruit, or both. Isaiah presents a future where such trees are not only found around the cities, but flourish in the wilderness.

The second set is a list of evergreen trees: fir, pine, and box (probably the cypress). These are normally found in the hills, not in the barren desert. This description contributes further to Isaiah’s promise of God’s overwhelming, unfettered, and unexpected provisioning in Israel’s future.

5. Why did the Lord promise to plant trees in the wilderness (v. 19)?

God will do the things of verses 18, 19 in such a way that Israel cannot question their source. They will see (physically experience), know (come to a realization), consider (ponder and think through), and understand (make sense of) these striking phenomena. The only possible conclusion will be that the Lord hath done this. Such acts are those in which the Creator of the universe has helped His chosen people in their distress in a mighty way.

We are reminded here of the ultimate fulfillment of this type of prophecy: God’s provision for His people in a Savior, Jesus the Messiah. In Him, the grace of God is lavished on a sinful and needy people, people dying of spiritual thirst. He becomes the chief cornerstone of God’s new spiritual temple, and those who observe Him must come to the inevitable conclusion that “this is the Lord’s doing” (Psalm 118:23, quoted in Matthew 21:42).

Similarly, we are often able to look back on various life events and clearly see the imprint of God’s hand. At the time of these events, however, we may see them as random, unconnected, even trivial. Later on, we may see how all of these things fit together in God’s plan for our lives, just as God was working out His plan for the nation of Israel. This does not mean that God causes bad things; rather, even bad things can be used in His larger plan for our present and future benefit as well as for His eternal glory.

6. What will Israel’s realize about “the Holy One” (v. 20)?

What Do You Think? How do we make sure we give God the credit when great things happen?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- On a personal level
- With regard to your church
- On a national level - Psalm 71:19; 106:21; 126:2,3

The “*Holy One of Israel*” is a frequent expression in Isaiah. Perhaps one of the reasons he used this phrase was because at the time of his call Isaiah had a vision of God’s holiness (6:1-8).

“The primary meaning of holy is ‘separate.’ It comes from an ancient word that means ‘to cut,’ or ‘to separate.’ . . . God’s holiness is more than just separateness. His holiness is also transcendent. The word transcendence means literally ‘to climb across.’ . . . Transcendence describes God in His consuming majesty, His exalted loftiness. It points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature” (Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, Tyndale).

The seraphim in Isaiah 6:3 unceasingly sang, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." Let us not only praise the Lord with our lips but also honor Him with our lives.

7. Why might Isaiah have especially focused on the holiness of God?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. When God chooses a people, He remains loyal to them to the end (Isaiah 1:8).
2. God always keeps His promises and His people (Isa. 41:8-9; cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Deut. 7:6).
3. The answer to fear is to focus on the promises of God and not on our circumstances (Isa. 41:10).
4. God provides for all mankind but especially for those who recognize themselves as poor and needy (Isa. 41:17; Matt. 5:3).
5. Whatever we need, our omnipotent God can do (Isa. 41:18).
6. God's miraculous acts are meant to draw us to His glory and majesty (vs. 19,20).

CONCLUSION

Chosen to Serve In 1884, General William T. Sherman was being considered as a possible U.S. presidential candidate. This veteran of America's Civil War had no interest in this, knowing that he had neither the skills nor the temperament to be a successful politician. Thus, Sherman famously declared that if drafted, he would not run; if nominated, he would not accept; if elected, he would not serve.

Sherman understood better than some of his contemporaries that election to public office was accompanied with the expectation of competent service. That was an era where some understood it differently. Many who were elected or appointed to office viewed it as an opportunity to enrich themselves through graft and other corrupt practices. They acted as if they were elected to be served.

The ancient Israelites occupied a special place in God's plans. They were intended to provide the moral and religious foundation for God's revelation of His Messiah. The nation was to show the world that there is one God, not many. They were to be examples of service to the one true God. The record in this regard was mixed. There were kings like Hezekiah who "did that which was right" (2 Kings 18:3), but there were many kings like Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, who "did that which was evil" (2 Kings 21:2). Kings in the latter category forgot the covenant that Israel had with God.

We, today, as the chosen people of God also have a covenant with Him. This is the new covenant of grace and salvation purchased by the blood of Jesus our Savior. He has promised to protect and empower His people. Our status should not be abused. It should result in yielding to God's will and serving Him.

PRAYER

Father, we marvel at Your grace, Your concern for us. We thank You for Your protection and provision and, most of all, for Your greatest gift: Jesus Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER You are called to serve the Lord God Almighty.