

ISAIAH 42:1-4

*"Look at my servant,
whom I strengthen.
He is my chosen one,
who pleases me.
I have put my Spirit
upon him.
He will bring justice to
the nations.*

*He will not shout or
raise his voice in public.
He will not crush the
weakest reed or put out
a flickering candle.*

*He will bring justice to
all who have been
wronged.*

*He will not falter or lose
heart
until justice prevails
throughout the earth.*

*Even distant lands
beyond the sea will wait
for his instruction."*

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

THE SERVANT SONGS

I want to take you along a slightly different path this week. I want to share with you a hint of the study that I do before I write my message for each Sunday. And the OT text for this week is a great way to start.

When we read different books and letters in the Bible, we perceive of them as the work of this or that particular author, written by a particular person, in a specific time, with a single coherent message. What we find out is that over decades and maybe even centuries different writers and editors have had a hand in compiling the final product, the scriptures which we accept as the Word of God.

There are all sorts of reasons for editing. The best one revolves around the writings of Jeremiah. Baruch was a very close friend and also his editor and secretary. At one point, the king ordered that all of

Jeremiah's writings be burnt. Baruch was given the task of writing down the prophecies all over again, from memory. There are indications that editing occurred in the process.

But it is the writings of the prophet Isaiah which give indications of compiling and editing. Sometimes messages which share a theme, but are spoken in quite different styles, are joined together. In other cases there are specific titles for the Messiah being used in quite different messages.

Our OT text for today is Isaiah 42:1-9. It is called a Servant Song, because in this message the Messiah is called My Servant as he is in other chapters (49, 50, 52:13-53:12). These servant songs have very unique characteristics yet are spoken into diverse situations.

At the same time, in Isaiah 42, Yahweh begins by talking about "My Servant". But after declaring the significance of God's role in creation, Yahweh directs his message to the Servant. Jesus quotes these words as proof that the prophets spoke directly about him.

I often wonder how the message would have been received by the people of Israel to whom Isaiah was speaking. To whom was he making this promise? "I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. I will take you by the hand and guard you, and I will give you to my people, Israel, as a symbol of my covenant with them. And you will be a light to guide the nations".

Or who was he speaking about, in the past tense, when he described My Servant in these terms?

My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, sprouting from a root in dry and sterile ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.....

He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care.

The words spoken refer to a past event. Yet their focus and meaning speak of Jesus, who lived and died 400 years into the future. And their impact is most powerful when they speak directly to us, 2500 years later as we reflect on how human beings have responded to Jesus.

For Isaiah, My Servant is the fulfilment of the Old Covenant and a beacon of hope for all nations.

Your shepherd-servant and brother in Christ.

Pastor Geoff