

A WORD FROM THE WORD

God speaks first to the people of Israel about his chosen one, the Messiah.

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.

Then God speaks to his chosen one, the Messiah, My Servant.

"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.

What do you value about Jesus and his influence on our society, on societies and governments throughout the world? I can identify three.

- Jesus has changed how we relate to each other, culturally—every individual is valued, irrespective of their status in society.
- Jesus has changed the focus and purpose of Justice—the law is to provide justice for every individual, especially the lowly. All are equal before the law and before God. However there is an interesting time in history when kings and rulers refused to be accountable to anybody, because they ruled by Divine Right. God had put them in authority and only God could remove them.
- The grace and mercy of Jesus has brought Hope to people from all nations, even those who don't believe in him. There are so many societies who look to the forgiveness and compassion of Christ as a beacon of hope and light.

That doesn't mean that we always get it right. In most Christian communities and societies there are Christian leaders who have sought to manipulate society for their own benefit, usually by making the justice system work for them, and protecting their own power through the political system.

There is another question to consider—Is Jesus' role in our world, more globally focused through his direction and guidance of governments and leaders more important than how he touches each individual through his Spirit? Which is more important for you?

The exile to Babylon was an absolute catastrophe for the people of Israel. According to the prophets the exile was a consequence of the total abuse of power by its shepherds, its rulers. Added to that abuse, the ruling elite had thoroughly rejected the social and spiritual contract that Yahweh had established with his people. It was at this time that Isaiah, Ezekiel and other prophets were given the task of presenting an image of leadership and society which was radically different from what they were experiencing.

What was promised was radical and life changing. It was intended to change the way people lived and how they understood God in their lives. And the focus of this new experience of life was ***The Messiah—My Shepherd—The Good Shepherd***. Pick your own title for the Christ, the anointed one.

The words of Isaiah 42 speak of God's promises to his people Israel, and they focus specifically on the role of the Messiah. In these verses the Messiah is titled "***My Servant***". This is a title that he was also given in Isaiah 49, 50 and 52-53. It is very clear that in all of these promises a very specific role of the Messiah is being set out for us to follow. As an aside, these verses are among the promises that Jesus often referred to when declaring that "**the Law and the prophets speak about me**."

In the words of Isaiah 42, there are two very specific tasks to be given to "***My Servant***"—Bring **Justice** to the nations (especially where there is suffering) and to demonstrate God's **Righteousness** (so that God's will is fulfilled in the fullness of blessings that we experience in our lives).

In any discussion about God and his relationship with his people, justice and righteousness are always drawn together. Justice and righteousness express how God deals with the world, how he deals with us individually and how he deals with the communities and societies that we live in. Because God is God—his will is holy and perfect....(you could add to those descriptions, love mercy and compassion are all expressions of his righteousness)—his actions fulfill all that is righteous and just. However, there are nuances in different contexts.

Firstly, when society is functioning as it is intended, when the field is fruitful, the righteousness of God is revealed. On the other hand, when society is flawed and broken, there are massive inequities. These inequalities occur when those with power, wealth and authority abuse their place in society and take advantage of their resources so that others are squashed without any way of relieving their suffering, then God reaches into our world and seeks to bring justice to the oppressed, however you would identify them.

In this promise, it is Justice that is focused on and Isaiah describes Justice this way:

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.

Or later on, when identifying the role of "***My Servant***" among the nations, justice which comes from the hand of the Messiah is described in these terms:

You will open the eyes of the blind.

***You will free the captives from prison,
releasing those who sit in dark dungeons.***

"I am the LORD; that is my name!"

This is what God expects of both **the Messiah** and those who live under the wings of his grace. Or you could say, “live in the light of his love.”

But then Isaiah makes two very definitive statements about **“My Servant”** which have a significant impact on the role of Christ in our societies. The first is that **“My Servant”** is the fulfilment of God’s covenant with Israel. The people of Israel looked Yahweh for justice and righteousness, but it is Christ whose life, death and resurrection has fulfilled all the promises made by God to his chosen people.

The second, and in many ways, the most far reaching for the nations, no matter whom they worship is that **“My Servant”** is the Light shining for all nations, sent to give hope to those who don’t even know of the creator.

It is this role in our world which so many people fail to recognize, even when they can see the differences which they so desperately for.

The impact of Christ’s role in our world has been felt throughout history and across all nations. His life as the carer for all human beings, no matter how insignificant that person might be, has given hope to all who seek a new, better life. The Samaritan, the deaf and the speechless, the terminally ill, the paralysed and even the tax collectors (public servants) were all beneficiaries of the mercy of Christ. And societies have long looked towards Christ’s example of justice and mercy as a beacon of hope and light in a world where pure power and greed have always devastated communities and shattered lives.

The righteousness of the Father and the grace and mercy (justice is the word used in Isaiah) of **“My Servant”** are the Light that Christ shines on the world, the hope that many in our world cling to, even when those people still won’t recognize Christ as the Son of God. The Light shines and his Hope inspires—all because of the Christ-child born in Bethlehem.