

Jesus is Messiah
Isaiah 42:1-9, Luke 4:14-21

Brothers and sisters, do any of you keep in touch with your old high school class mates or college friends... or have you ever attended a class reunion? Or maybe you've searched social media to look up people you remember going to school with to see if you can find their profile?

Part of the attraction in doing this, aside from the fact that you might actually have ongoing friendships with some of them, is to see what's become of them.

What happened to that socially awkward kid everyone made fun of? What happened to the cool jock, the star of the football team and his pretty cheerleader girlfriend? Did the president of the student council actually end up going into politics? Did the stoners and skateboarders continue to get in trouble with the law and end up in jail? What happened to all these people you used to hang around and go to school with? What are they like now... and what would they think of you?

I'm sure that given what I was like back in high school, my old class mates would be very surprised to find out that I became a minister. And if by chance, one of them ended up visiting Valleyview on a Sunday morning without knowing I was the pastor here, it would be a very strange experience for them to reconcile their memories of what I used to be like in highschool with the man who they see leading the service and preaching the Word of God to them.

No doubt many of the people who had gathered at the Synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus came back to his hometown had a hard time reconciling their memories of Mary and Joseph's little boy with this man who had become a popular teacher and was now reading the scriptures to them at their Synagogue.

This son of a carpenter who used to run around playing with the other boys in their insignificant town now earning praise and gaining a glowing reputation in the northern region of Judea as an inspiring teacher of the Torah, who would have thought it!

However, reconciling these contrasting realities - would not be... nearly as difficult or impossible to resolve - as it will be to reconcile the fact... that this carpenter's boy turned teacher had just told them that a significant messianic prophecy from the book of Isaiah was being fulfilled in front of them... by Him!

Brothers and sisters Jesus has just dropped a bomb on His hometown people and laid claim to being the promised Messiah! I'm sure we can understand this was a bit of a surprise, but I'm not sure we appreciate just how shocking and incredulous this was.

Mostly because its kind of obvious to us that Jesus is the Messiah, having the benefit of two thousand years of hindsight and the New Testament writings.

However, I think its important that we get a better and more fulsome sense of who this promised messianic figure was supposed to be - from the perspective of the Old Testament –

which then allows us to better understand who Jesus is as this Messiah.

You see most of our connection with Jesus as the Messiah comes up at Christmas and Easter with references like Isaiah 9:6 *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Micah 5:2 *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel."* and Isaiah 53:5 *"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."*

But in my experience, we tend to utilize these verses as supporting references, they are additional Old Testament trimmings that augment these special occasions. With Isaiah 9:6 the emphasis at Christmas is on a child who has been

born, a **son** has been given, because it's Jesus' birthday – we don't focus on the what it means with respect that the gov't will be on his shoulders and all the titles that go along with that. Not on Christmas Eve...

So as we continue to look at who Jesus is in this sermon series we need to take a closer look at what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah – not as someone whose life happens to tick off an O.T. messianic check-list: ok needs to be born of a virgin... check, um, is he born in Bethlehem? Yes – ok check, what about his Davidic lineage? Yes? Ok, check. Gosh – looks like we're getting pretty close to Him being the Messiah. Has he trampled on the head of the serpent yet??

Brothers and sisters, Jesus doesn't fit into the Messianic prophecies retro-actively, rather these Messianic prophecies define and give birth to who Jesus is supposed to be. This is why Jesus goes back to His hometown of Nazareth, among the people who would have known Him from birth and watched Him grow up to make this announcement about who He really is...

Jesus is stating, emphasizing by being back where He grew up, that its **not** things like family or where you're from, what your father's vocation is and so on... these things will not define Him – it's the definition of the Messiah given in the scriptures which is going to define who He will reveal Himself to be as the Messiah.

So Jesus deliberately chooses a reading from the Prophet Isaiah – because brothers and sisters – out of all the Old Testament scriptures Isaiah has the most messianic prophecies and also the most descriptive prophecies of the messiah.

So Jesus chooses to read from the last of these prophecies, found in Isaiah 61, and there are two things we can learn from what He selects to read. First, by reading the last messianic description He's simultaneously referencing everything that has been said about the Messiah in all the prior descriptions.

Secondly, we should take note that Jesus stopped reading halfway through vs. 2 and left out part of this Messianic

prophecy which foretells God's final judgement on the nations who have persecuted Israel. The full verse says *"to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor - **and** the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn"*, Jesus stops at the Year of the Lord's favor.

In hindsight, and from Jesus' and the Apostle's teaching in the New Testament, we now understand this to mean that there are two parts to the work of the Messiah and that in His first coming Jesus is not bringing the vengeance of God upon the nations of the world but rather a time of God's favor and blessing. It is at His second coming when Jesus returns that He will come in vengeance to defeat and destroy those who oppose and persecute God's people.

Thus, after the resurrection in Acts 1:6-8 Jesus' disciples are asking Him *"Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* is it time now for the vengeance and vindication of us as God's people? But Jesus answers *"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit*

comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And so brothers and sisters – fellow disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, followers of the Messiah... here is another description of what it looks like when we are at our best, and it is predicated upon our ability to understand what it means to confess (not just say) that Jesus is... the Messiah.

So – we turn to Isaiah 42:7 this morning, where the messianic actions Jesus read from chapter 61:1 are first mentioned, and we see that it talks about *"open[ing] the eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."*

This is an example of how the final Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 61 draws from and summarizes all the prophecies that come before it. And because of the almost identical wording that chapter 61 brings forward from 42:7 I believe that looking at this particular messianic description in chapter 42 will give us the best understanding of how Jesus is defining Himself as

the Messiah – and then of course, assist us as His followers to be at our best.

So this Messianic prophecy goes from vs. 1 to 9, and its divided into four sections. First vs.1 – 4, where God is speaking to the nation of Israel, who is currently in exile in Babylon for their covenant unfaithfulness, and He’s introducing them to His ultimate Servant.

Second is vs 5, where Isaiah is speaking in contrast to God introducing His ultimate servant, the Prophet Isaiah is announcing God.

Third vs. 6-7, after having been properly announced God speaks again and now addresses and speaks directly to His ultimate servant,

And forth in vs. 8-9, God returns to addressing Israel, explaining why He is introducing this ultimate servant of His and concludes by telling them *“don’t say I never tell you nothing!”*

So who is the ultimate servant that God is introducing to Israel, well at this point its not yet fully known but He will be characterized as *“being upheld”* -and I’ll spare you the word study on this but this means that He is going to get the full portfolio of God’s work given to Him.

What is that work? Well its what God had originally given to Israel – whom God had originally called His chosen ones and delighted in. *Ex 19:5 “you will be My treasured possession [delight] out of all the nations... you shall be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* These relational terms will now be applied to this Servant along with the priestly task and purpose originally given to Israel.

God will also equip the Servant with His Holy Spirit, and instead of just being a light for the nations, as Israel was - this Servant will go out to bring justice to the nations.

And this Servant will bring justice in a particular manner, it will be gentle – not in the spirit of vengeance, no shouting or war cries... but in the spirit of healing, so as not to break peoples

spirits or extinguish what little spark of obedience might remain. So the servant will be gentle as He brings justice – yet He will be firm. It says *“in faithfulness he will bring forth justice”* It is justice and correction according to God’s Law, not indulgence, permissiveness, or affirmation.

And in spite of any opposition to this task the Servant will persist, *“he will not falter nor be discouraged”* until it is completed across the earth, which for the ancient Israelites meant going as far as the islands.

Now Jesus knows all this brothers and sisters and He understands this is what defines Him, He’s not trying to fit Himself into it – rather God’s prophecy here is what makes Him who He is, its God’ prophecy is working itself out into existence, into fulfillment through Jesus. This is God’s Word and Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is the Servant the chosen one. His visit to His hometown comes just after God has poured out the Holy Spirit upon Him at His baptism – just a couple chapters earlier in the gospel of Luke.

Jesus is gentle in bringing justice, reading from the prophet Isaiah about opening the eyes of the blind, setting the captive free, proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor and stopping... not reading the part about the day of God’s vengeance.

He will continue to show this gentleness both by refusing to mount a political campaign and an armed rebellion against Rome, and also through healing the sick, casting out demons, and associating with those who are sinners and unclean. But Jesus is not permissive or affirming... his gentle words are firm *“Repent for the Kingdom of God is here!”* (Matt 4:17) *“Go and sin no more!”* (John 8:11)

And... He is still working to establish His justice on the earth, his task has not stopped – He has not faltered or given up, He is pursuing it to the ends of the earth - all the way to the islands - through His commission to His followers, His servants – through the words delivered to the disciples *“go make disciples of all nations!”*

And as we read how Yahweh will put His Spirit upon His Servant – so too in Acts 1:6 we have Jesus say to His servants *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Brothers and sisters this isn't something that Jesus decided to do because it was a New Testament idea that He came up with for Himself and his disciples – it is God's Old Testament prophecy and intentions and will for the Messiah which He has spoken to Israel in the past now working itself out through Jesus as the Messiah.

Now lets take a closer look at what God says to the Servant in vs. 6-7 so that the Servant knows who He is and what His purpose is to be. Now you might be thinking *“wait a sec – we just had God telling Israel that the Servant was going to bring justice, isn't that His purpose?”*

Yes, but if the Servant has to bring justice it means there must be a deeper reason for why there is injustice and in this third

section God is telling the Servant that His true purpose is to address the reason for why He must bring justice with gentleness and faithfulness, and this deeper reason has two layers that must be dealt with.

The first layer has to do with Israel's covenant unfaithfulness. Vs. 6 is loaded with covenant terms, I the LORD, all caps small caps, Yaweh – God's covenant name... called you in righteousness. That is the very definition of what it means to be a faithful covenant keeper in the Old Testament. As Gen 15:6 states when Yahweh makes His covenant promise to Abram, Abram believed and it was credited to Him as... *Righteousness...* a faithful covenant response.

So in vs.6 Yahweh the Covenant God is promising the Servant that Yahweh Himself is going to make the Servant faithful and enable Him to keep Covenant. He says *“I will take your hand, I will keep you..”* the end result of this is that the Servant Himself will become a Covenant for Israel – the people, God will make Him into this. Now I don't need to go into any more

detail on this because this is what last week's sermon was all about as we looked at how Jesus is the Mediator.

But now we know that the first layer of "why" the Servant has to address injustice is because of Israel's Covenant unfaithfulness – which by the way is the whole backdrop to the book of Isaiah.

The second layer is about what causes this Covenant unfaithfulness – Sin. And it affects Israel, and also the Gentiles – because they are obviously not doing what Israel was supposed to demonstrate for them in the covenant.

And God describes Sin in two ways here, first as blindness that keeps us from seeing the truth and second as a captor who keeps us in prison from doing what is right. So the servant is to be a light for the Gentiles – which means that they are affected by sin in that it blinds them from seeing the truth about God and His Law. However, Sin goes deeper than this – its not simply ignorance.

Israel had been given the Law and could not claim spiritual blindness, ignorance, like the Gentiles for their covenant unfaithfulness, rather they had demonstrated that were under the captive power of Sin. The law was not effective enough to break the power of Sin over their consciences - like we talked about last week, so that even though they could see what was right – they still did what was wrong. They were captive to Sin's power.

So the Servant's covenant faithfulness with Yahweh will thus address both aspects of Sin so that both Israel and the Gentiles can receive the blessing that God intends from the Servant, so vs. 7 concludes with a combined metaphor about *"releasing from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."* It has both aspects of not seeing and being captive in a dungeon of darkness.

So whatever it is that you know about how Jesus was perfect, how He kept the Law of Moses, how He did not come to abolish it, but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17) How He only did the will

of His Father, that the Son does nothing of His own will but only what He sees the Father doing (John 5:19)

That's not just something Jesus comes up with in the New Testament that somehow fits back into all of this... again it's God's Old Testament prophecy and intentions and will for the Messiah which He has spoken in advance, working itself out into fulfillment through Jesus. So perhaps we instead of saying Jesus is the Messiah – we might better say Messiah is Jesus.

Now how does this help us to be at our best as followers of the Messiah?

I think as we have this sense of God's prior intentions and will that has been expressed in the past and moves forwards in fulfillment to work itself out in and through Jesus we begin to see God's Holy Spirit continuing that movement in ourselves as Jesus' followers.

There's an intentional movement forward to accomplish what God has already planned that sweeps us up and carries us

along with it – as opposed to retro actively trying to connect Jesus to a few Messianic prophecies, and not really being certain of what direction God is going with His Kingdom work in any sense beyond having our sins forgiven.

Now don't get me wrong – having our Sin dealt with by the Messiah both in breaking its power over our lives and taking away its blindness from us is our fundamental starting point.

But as we just saw in this prophecy, God started out with the big concept of justice and then narrowed it down to Covenant and then focused in on Sin, once our sin is dealt with as followers of Jesus we need to move from the specific focus on Sin and broaden out to Covenant and what that means in terms of the Messiah's bigger task of bringing justice to the nations.

Now justice is a hot topic these days. We've got social justice, there's climate justice, there are people advocating for indigenous justice, which is connected to economic justice, and that brings up things like the Fed Gov'ts plan for our

energy sector, the “Just transition” which is any but - so we’ll likely have to deal with it through our justice system.

And as followers of Jesus, we may be wondering if any of this is Messianic justice - that we should also be pursuing? Well, the answer is both yes and no.

You see the concept of justice in the book of Isaiah is about the Messiah setting things straight, putting things back how they’re supposed to be, in the right order. In fact, older translations of Isaiah used the word judgement instead of justice to reflect this. So, our current pre-occupation with all sorts of justice these days actually reflects that things have gotten out of order and that are not as they should be. So yes, followers of the Messiah should be pursuing *messianic* justice in all areas of life and society.

But it needs to be *messianic* justice, that’s the important adjective. Any other adjective in front of justice – no matter how well intentioned is going to miss the important insights that God reveals to the Messiah about why there is injustice –

and that is Covenant unfaithfulness and Sin with its captive and blinding power over us.

Now I know that might sound like a bit of a pat answer, but its true – and our pre-occupation with justice has been going on long enough now that we can see the evidence of how “*social*” justice goes off course because of it.

It’s not noticeable at first when we’re working for civil rights and fighting against all kinds of discrimination which prevents people from getting jobs, finding housing, accessing proper health care and education for racial or religious reasons. But it’s starts to drift when people are needing to be accepted as students or hired for positions to fill racial quotas instead of for their academic or professional qualifications.

And its way off the rails when fighting discrimination means that we must extend medically assisted suicide to those who suffer from mental illness – because... if we offer it to those who are terminally ill but not mentally ill, then we are guilty of “discriminating.”

And I don't need to go into details on how this foolishness is playing out with respect to discrimination if a man thinks he's a woman or a woman thinks she's a man.

So while it might seem simplistic to say that we need to account for the underlying issues of Covenant unfaithfulness and Sin when dealing with justice, its becoming very obvious with how things are out of order now that it is absolutely necessary.

And, we will be at our best as followers of the Messiah as we work to establish messianic justice in society, in our economy, for indigenous people and wherever else it is evident that things need to be put back in order.

Now – I need to wrap this up, I know... but I need to quickly give you five short descriptors of Messianic justice so you'll know how to discern it and also pursue it.

First Messianic justice sets things right by putting God back as Creator over all His creation – He is Holy over it and from it.

Second, it sets things right in His creation according to God's design and intentions, His Word for His Creation. Think about what we what we learn in the Talk Show...

Third, it sets thing right with God's plan to save His creation. Israel is to be honored, not persecuted... for salvation comes from the Jews, and is graciously extended to us Gentiles.

Fourth, it sets things right with gentleness and firmness. It does not cry out in the street with revolution and violence but it does not back down in calling for obedience to God's law or His plan of salvation.

And fifth and last, it has the wisdom to know what to leave for the Messiah himself to sort out and set right when He returns.

We can't sort out history or set things right which may appear to be wrong to us today which happened in the past – we are not able to sort out the wheat and the weeds lest we pull up the wheat in the process.. but the Messiah can, and He will when He returns.

So – brothers and sisters... Messiah is Jesus, and confessing this truth and all that it means will lead us to be at our best in pursuing Messianic justice wherever we can see that things are not right and are out of order.

May the Holy Spirit empower us for this, may we not falter or be discouraged as servants of the Messiah, may we bring honor and glory to Him in all we do – to the very ends of the earth. Amen.