

SET FREE THROUGH GOD’S PERFECT SERVANT, THE MESSIAH, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST ISAIAH 42:01–09

Introduction

If there has ever been a day when people needed help, encouragement, rescuing, it is today. People are sinking ever deeper in the sand under the weight of heavy burdens, constant and brazen temptations, unimaginable evil, and a growing insensitivity and indifference to it all. In addition, a host of personal problems are overwhelming people’s spirits today, problems such as...

- dissatisfaction, purposelessness, emptiness
- tension, pressure and anxiety
- insufficient income, financial difficulty, bankruptcy
- unemployment, loss of job, lack of skills
- a sense of discouragement, failure, inadequacy

People’s need for help is the reason for the present Scripture. God knows our desperate need, and with deep compassion He has stepped forward to meet it. This He did by sending His Servant, the Messiah, into the world. Through His very own Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, God gives us the power to endure and conquer the hardships that threaten to crush us. He meets all the needs of the human heart, which He created to love and have fellowship with Him. This passage is the first of four “Servant Songs” in the book of Isaiah (49:1-13; 50:1-11; 52:12-53:12). This is, *Set Free Through God’s Perfect Servant, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (the First of Four Servant Songs)*, Isaiah 42:1-25.

- I. The promise to send the Messiah (vv. 1-4).
- II. The mission of the Messiah (vv. 5-9).
- III. The response to the Messiah (vv. 10-17).
- IV. The summons to believe God’s promise (vv. 18-25).

I. *Isaiah 42:01–04 Prophecy Promising the Coming of the Messiah*

This is a prophecy predicting the coming of the Messiah, a prophecy given some seven hundred years before the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth. The godly nature and character of the Messiah is discussed first, for the eternal fate of people hinges on their understanding of who the Messiah is. God Himself is speaking about the Messiah, which indicates the extreme importance of this passage:

1. The Messiah will be God’s *Servant* (v. 1). “Behold! My Servant.” *Behold* means to sit up and take notice. “Here is my Servant” (NIV). Pay attention to Him. “Look at my Servant” (NLT). God is presenting His Servant, the Messiah, to the world. So He
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commands the world to look, to pay attention to Him. Being God's Servant means that the Messiah will be *devoted* to God. His heart will be set on doing exactly what God commands. God is sending the Messiah into the world on a very specific mission, and since He is God's *Servant*, the Messiah's task will be to carry out the mission assigned Him. This is the announcement God is making. "Behold! My Servant." He is coming to accomplish God's will on earth, and God declares that He will uphold Him. No matter what the difficulties or how great the opposition, God Almighty will sustain, strengthen and protect His Servant. He will make sure the Messiah accomplishes His task. Nothing will defeat Him or keep Him from doing God's will.

2. The Messiah will be God's *Chosen One*. He has been called, appointed by God Himself. He has not been conceived or sent on His mission by an earthly ruler or heavenly being, but rather by God Himself. The coming of the Messiah into the world was not determined by the wisdom of men, but rather by the infinite wisdom of God. God and God alone appointed the Messiah. He is God's Chosen One. And God takes great delight in the Messiah, in all that He is in His nature and character and in all the work that He accomplishes. God expressed His delight in the Lord Jesus Christ on two different occasions — at His baptism and at His transfiguration:

Mat 3:16-17 As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Mat 17:1-5 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

3. The Messiah will have God's very own Spirit. This passage stresses that the Messiah will be filled with the fullness of God's Spirit. God's Spirit will rest on Him, fully equipping Him to carry out His task. Down through history, God had given His Spirit to His servants, but they were mere human beings, so the power of the Spirit to work through them was always limited. But that will not be the case with the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. The Spirit of the LORD — all the fullness of God Himself — will rest upon Him (11:2; Col 2:8).
4. The Messiah will be righteous and just, possessing within His very nature the perfection of virtue and decency. Thus, He will bring true justice to the nations and the people of the world. Note how important this is to God, for it is mentioned three

times in these four verses (vv. 1, 3, 4). Keep in mind that *true justice* is the result of acting exactly as one should, always doing what is right, and treating others as they should be treated. *True justice* and *salvation* are strong counterparts in that righteous behaviour is often times a good indication of a person's salvation, and salvation leads to righteous behaviour. The point being emphasized is this: the Messiah's very nature compels Him to save the world by establishing justice among its nations and peoples. Of course, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to set up God's kingdom on earth, His justice will be all that is needed to save the world and to eliminate all wicked and evil behaviour.

5. The Messiah will be peaceful, not boisterous, threatening or lawless (v. 2). He will not be a rabble-rouser or a trouble-maker. He will not take part in riots, uprisings or revolts. He will not be violent, but rather have a calm, restful spirit. As a man of peace, He will share the message of harmony between people and between God and people.

Luke 2:13-14 *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."*

John 14:27 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

John 16:33 *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Acts 10:36 *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Eph 2:14 *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Isa 53:5 *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

6. The Messiah will be compassionate (v. 3). His very nature will be one of love, mercy and understanding. Because of His nature, His entire life will be focused on pastoral care. Note the reference to a bruised reed. Bruised reeds are useless, so people break them and discard them. But because the Messiah's heart is full of compassion, He will not break or throw anyone away as useless. To the contrary, His very purpose for coming to earth will be to help the bruised, those who have been wounded and

weakened by the trials and hardships of life. *Smoking flax* or *smouldering wick* (NIV) is a picture of people whose lives lack purpose and meaning, who have lost almost all faith and hope. Whatever desires or expectations they did have nearly been snuffed out, and a sense of despair grips their hearts. But God promises that the Messiah will have compassion on the smouldering wicks of the earth. He will cup them in His hands and keep the flame — their hope and sense of purpose — from burning out. The Messiah will be faithful to treat them justly, just as they should be treated, and to strengthen and lift them up. By meeting their need, He will prove faithful and bring true justice to earth.

Thought 1. Note the people upon whom Christ had compassion:

(1) Christ had compassion upon the weak, the purposeless and the aimless — upon all who had lost faith and hope.

Mat 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

(2) Christ had compassion on the sick, those who were diseased.

Mat 9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Mat 14:14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

(3) Christ had compassion on the hungry, those who had nothing to eat and were faint from hunger.

Mat 15:32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

(4) Christ had compassion on those who could not pay their debts.

Mat 18:27 The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

(5) Christ had compassion on the blind.

Mat 20:34 Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

(6) Christ had compassion on lepers, those considered most unclean.

Mat 11:5 "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

Mark 1:40-41 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

(7) Christ had compassion on the bereaved, the grief-stricken who had lost loved ones.

Luke 7:12-14 *As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out — the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”*

(8) Christ had compassion on people who repented, who turned away from their sins and returned to God.

Luke 15:20 *So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

7. The Messiah will be steadfast and persevering (v. 4). He will not falter, fail, or become discouraged. No matter what difficulty, hardship or opposition confronts Him, He will persist in His task. He will not give up or stop until true justice — truth and righteousness — are established on earth. He will be totally committed to teaching God's law, His Holy Word, and to giving hope to the people of the earth. And He will not rest until He has accomplished His purpose — until all the islands, all the distant lands beyond the sea, place their trust and hope in His law (Holy Word).

Thought 1. What a powerful example for us! We must be steadfast and persevering in the task of reaching the world for Christ. We must not falter or be discouraged by hardship or opposition. We must not allow anything to stop us from taking the glory of God to the farthest ends of the earth. We must press on until the task is fully accomplished.

Mat 10:22 *All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

Gal 6:9 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time He will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Phil 1:27 *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.*

2 Tim 4:1-8 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But*

you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

1 Pet 1:13 *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

1 Pet 5:8-9 *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

2 Pet 3:17-18 *Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

II. Isaiah 42:05–09 The Mission of the Messiah

Having described the character of the Messiah, God now discusses His Servant's mission, which He says will not fail. Of this, people can rest assured. It is almost incomprehensible that God would send His Son into the world as a Servant of the human race. And yet God has always known that many would not believe His Servant (Jesus Christ) and would reject Him. He knew that some would refuse to bow the knee before Him in worship and that others would defy and curse Him. For these very reasons He wants the world to clearly understand three facts.

1. *God the LORD* guarantees the success of the Servant's mission (v. 5). The guarantee is not being given by a mere human being or by any so-called god people might worship. It is given by *God the LORD* Himself, the only true and living God. Because He is true and living, He has the power to guarantee the coming of the Messiah and the fulfilment of His mission. But this is not the only power of God that guarantees the success of the Servant's mission.
 - a. God's creative power also guarantees that He will send the Messiah and fulfil His mission on earth. God is the great Creator of the entire universe, of earth and heaven with all the planets and stars throughout space. And He is the One who has given breath and life to every person in the world.
 - b. God's righteousness also guarantees that the Messiah will come and fulfil His purpose on earth (v. 6). God will always do what is *right*; He will always do the *righteous* thing. Because the world so desperately needs salvation, God will send the Messiah to save the world and to bring His righteousness to people. God's Servant will also

establish a righteous relationship with people, teaching them to do what is *right* as they live together and walk day by day acknowledging and worshipping God.

- c. God's presence and care also guarantee the coming of the Messiah and the fulfilment of His mission on earth (v. 6). God actually says that He will hold the hand of the Messiah. He will guide and take care of Him. God says that He will *keep* His Servant, or hold Him up and protect Him, as He goes about fulfilling His mission. Nothing, absolutely nothing, will keep God's Servant from doing exactly what God sends Him into the world to do.
2. The Messiah's mission was to have two very specific and important purposes. Note how these purposes meet the desperate needs of the world, the deepest needs of the human heart.
 - a. First, God's Servant will institute God's *new covenant*, a new relationship with His people. Note that the Messiah Himself is the new covenant. This fact is of critical importance. God will make the Lord Jesus Christ Himself the basis of the new relationship that He establishes with people. Formerly, God had established a covenant, a relationship, with Abraham through the wonderful promise of the *promised seed*. The promised seed was a reference to the coming Messiah, who would bring God's blessings to all the families of the earth (see notes, Gen 12:3). Later, God expanded His relationship with His people by promising David a descendant who would rule as king forever (see note, 2 Sam 7:11-17).

In the present Scripture, God expands the covenant again by promising a new relationship that His Servant will establish (Isa 49:8; 55:3; Jer 31:31-34; Eze 34:25). The Messiah will fulfil both the Abrahamic covenant of the *promised seed* and the Davidic covenant of the *promised king*. And shockingly the new covenant will be established by the death of God's Servant. Through His death, the Messiah will bring people into a right relationship with God, making it possible for Him to forgive their sins, satisfy their hunger and thirst for God, and fulfil their longing to live eternally.

Mat 26:28 *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

Rom 5:8-9 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

Heb 8:6-13 *But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt,*

because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

Heb 9:12-15 *He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Heb 12:24 *To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Isa 53:3-6 *He is despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Jer 31:31-34 *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

- b. Second, God's Servant will be God's light for all nations (v. 6). No longer will people have to stumble through life in darkness, wondering which way to go or how to handle the problems and hardships of life. No longer will people have to wonder where they have come from, why they are here, and where they are going. God promises that the Messiah will eliminate darkness from the face of the earth...
- all the darkness of ignorance, purposelessness, emptiness, aimlessness, loneliness
 - all the darkness of restlessness, anger, hostility, discrimination, prejudice and warfare

God's Servant will be sent to earth to bring God's light to the world. He will open the eyes of all who are spiritually blind and set free captives held in the darkness of sin and death. Through the light of God's Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, people can now be freed from the captivity of sin and death. The light of God's Servant has vanquished even the darkness of death and eternal separation from God. Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

Mat 4:16 *"The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

Luke 1:76-79 *"And you, my child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you wilt go before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun [Christ] will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."*

John 1:4 *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

John 8:12 *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

John 12:35 *Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going."*

John 12:46 *"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."*

2 Cor 4:6 *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Eph 5:14 *For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper; rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

Rev 21:23 *The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.*

Isa 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Isa 42:6 "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."

3. The LORD Himself ensures the mission of the Messiah (vv. 8-9). Note that God uses His distinctive name, *the LORD*, to guarantee its success. "That is my name!" He declares. He is the true and living God; therefore He will fulfil His promise. God will send His Servant into the world to fulfil His mission on behalf of God's people. He will not give His name or glory to anyone other than His Servant, the Messiah. He will not give His glory to another person, and He will never, ever allow any false god or idol to take credit for sending the Messiah into the world.

God's power, and His power alone, has fulfilled former predictions (v. 9). Therefore, His power will fulfil the predictions concerning the coming Messiah. Just as promised, He will send His Servant into the world, and He will make sure the Messiah fulfils His mission.

Mat 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."

Mat 20:28 "Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

John 5:30 "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

John 9:39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

1 Tim 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.

Heb 10:7, 9-10 Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, O God.'...Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ■