

Justice and Joy: The First Servant Song

Isaiah 42.1–17

Sermon

§ As you know my hometown Detroit went through bankruptcy a couple of yrs ago. Nothing ill'd dysfunction & mismanagement of city leadership like the streetlights. Or, shall I say, absence of streetlights. Hard to bel, but two yrs ago roughly 40% of 88,000 streetlights not working. Whole neighborhoods in dark, criminals thrived under cover of night, enormously negative impact on quality of life. Lack of streetlights was like a huge sign hung over the city: "Out of order."

While certainly an extreme case, Detroit's probs illustrative of prob everywhere. No matter where you turn, seems that soc is out of order, whether talking about Syria's civil war/simmering Cold War-era tensions/refugee crisis, decimation of Docs wo Borders hosp in Afgh, mass murders in Sandy Hook/Va Tech/Rosenberg, OR, VW's admission that they cheated emissions tests, take down of an Afr-Amer tennis star mistaken for a criminal. Sure there are bright spots, still beauty. But even if 60% of lights are on, darkness still rules. Life not the way it ought to be. As if a huge sign hung over our world: "Out of order." Will our world ever be what it ought? Will G not step in & do something?

B's word for this: justice. & it's focus of today's psg. Isa 42 (p. 502). § 1st of 4 Serv Songs. Communion Suns savoring 4th (Isa 53), 2nd in 49, 3rd in 50. This psg ans the q: want to know what G will do to make the world what he wants? Look at his Serv. § [Read text.]

Scr speaks of **justice** 2 ways. § On one hand, establishment of standard of conduct bet G & peo and in relats bet peo. What Xian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff helpfully calls "primary justice." Heb term for this (*tsedaqah*) often translated *righteousness*. If everyone lived this way, there'd be no need for 2nd kind of justice, "rectifying justice," i.e.,

rectifying lack of conformity to standard. If 1st is way things ought to be, 2nd is putting things back the way they ought to be. Heb term for this (*mishpat*) often translated *justice*. Word appears 3x here (v 1, 3, 4).

If you're going to restore order/rectify things so that life/soc/world way it ought to be, have to do three things. Three aspects of bringing justice. § **Informative** aspect: peo need to know what right conduct is. See that in v 4 §: *in his teaching the islands will put their hope. teaching* = lit. "law, Torah." Serv will come to instruct peo as to how they are to live. Whatever Serv's instruction is, it must be good, fruit of it must be very desirable bc peo *put their hope* in it. Expectation that all will be the way it should be if his law is followed. §

But what if teaching isn't followed? § **Punitive** aspect: dealing w those who don't conform (vv 13-15) §: *his enemies*. Time will come when G will deal w all the evil in world. For now he chooses to show patience, ergo ill of pregnant woman in v 14. Waiting for time to act. G's patience w evil one of hardest things for us to comprehend. "Why not take care of it now?" Very imp q, I think you'll find ans to be very good. §

But a 3rd req. § **Restorative** aspect. If punitive aspect is justice directed toward perps, restorative aspect is justice directed toward those perps overran—broken, neglected, marginalized, forgotten, powerless. Ergo beautiful descrip of Serv in v 3. § *Bruised reed will not break*: not stated why reed bruised or what it's good for, but Serv's care for broken on vivid display. Not there to rub face in their bruising, nor does he value them only for what they can give him. Tender care. *Smoldering wick will not snuff out*: looks at flickering ember dift than everyone else. Rather than see it as worthy only of being snuffed out/left to die in a cold, dark room, Serv takes that which looks lifeless & gives it new life/fans into flame. These two ills given specific app in v 7 §: *blind, captive, those in darkness*. Serv brings justice by restoring broken.

Now for G to **promise** this is **enormous** indeed. Every pres election cycle we get our hopes up that our cand will be able to make changes nec to get things (or keep things, as the case may be) headed in the right dir. And what gives rise to those hopes is the frustration that the current leader isn't doing it, either bc they're from the wrong party so everything they do is bad, or bc they didn't implement everything they said they were going to do. But here G is saying his Serv will accomplish all of this §: he'll get everyone on the same page as to what justice is, he'll execute appropriate judgment on those who violate his teaching, & he'll restore all those who've been overrun by oppression to a place of healing & wholeness.

But the promise gets even bigger when you see the scope of it. If G were to do this just for his peo—nat of Isr—we'd all want to move & live there. But we don't have to, bc G explicitly says this promise is for the nats, its scope is **international** §: *islands* (v 4) = "coastlands," not just Philippines & Caribbean, but any land surrounded by water, ergo landmasses/continents/nats. Serv will establish justice everywhere there is peo, not just in Jeru/Judah/Isr. vv. 10–12. & if you should wonder why G would include nats in promise, it's bc he isn't just the G of Jeru/Judah/Isr, but the G of the whole earth. Descrip of himself in v 5 §. Everything that lives lives bc G gives it life. You're breathing right now bc G is giving you your breath—even if you don't bel in him/hate him. G made everyone & therefore cares for everyone he has made. No wonder then G tells Serv §: "you will be *a cov for peo & a light for Gens*" (v 6). Serv will himself be the cov, that which binds G & humanity tog, means by which broken humanity is restored to G & to 1A. 1st Serv Song an enormous promise w an international scope.

Which makes us ask: who is this Serv & when will this happen? One poss interp of Serv's **identity** § is **Isr as a nat**. After all 1st occurrence of term *serv* (41.9) specifically id'ed *serv* as Isr—*Jacob whom I have chosen, seed of Abr my friend*. If you follow this interp, nat of Isr will

be means by which justice will flow to nats, their laws will be that in which nats hope, they will be means of executing justice on perps worldwide, theirs is resp to restore broken & bring healing to all peos. A number of ways to respond to this interp, but perhaps none more imp than a single phrase that makes this interp untenable §: in v. 4 *his instr.* As I noted before, Heb term here is Torah, often a tech term in Heb B for Mosaic law, Moses great lawgiver, none holds a higher place than he in history of Isr. & yet this Serv doesn't bring Moses' Torah, brings his own. No right-thinking Jew would dare exalt himself/herself to status of Moses, much less elevate themselves above Moses as one who can replace Moses' Torah w their own. Ergo Serv cannot be Isr as nat.

Leaves one other option: § Serv is Isr's **Messiah**, culmination of Isr's history, t&g Isr, great David's greater S. & that's precisely what the NT argues, & justifiably so. Serv of Isa 42 none other than J the X. §Mt 12.15–21: *Aware of this, J withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him & he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Is, etc.* All three elements here: *instructive* > teaching peo what true justice is, *restorative* > healing min, *punitive* > reason relig leaders wanted to kill him, bc he went after their sin.

"But he hasn't! That's my prob w this whole msg of Xianity. If G is going to bring justice to world/deal w those who have perpetrated violence & hatred & evil, why hasn't he done it yet?" Very good q, very hard q. Perh most difficult q for Xians to address. But I said there's a very good ans: if G were not **patient** w humanity, then he wouldn't be patient w you. If G were to execute justice on all who have violated his instructions, he would have already executed **justice on you too**. See, you & I are not exempt from perpetuating brokenness in world. We contribute to it by our own sin. Oh, we may not be pedophiles or murderers or extortioners or rapists—maybe not. But G doesn't grade on a curve, doesn't measure us against worst of soc & say we're ok. G

measures us against his own standard. & can you survive that eval? Never once elevated something to status of god in your life? Every thought about G you've ever had has been altogether accurate? Never employed his name for vain purposes? Perfectly care for your body & spirit through rest & worship? Always honor those to whom honor is due? Never hated anyone? Never lusted after anyone? Never took something that wasn't yours? Never lied? Never wanted something that belonged to another? Friends, not one of us stands test. We're all guilty.

& if we're honest, the pic of G coming as a Warrior is frightening—bc he's coming for us. Arrival of justice is bad news for us bc of our own injustice. But here's the beauty of this Serv, of J the M. Allow me to quote bib scholar John Oswalt §: "When this mighty, delivering warrior appears to destroy the enemies of God, whose blood is it that stains his garments? [It's not his enemies' blood.] § It is **his own**" (NICOT, 2.125). Hope of gos: Serv came to establish justice & the way he established justice is by letting sword of justice fall on him. See, had he come to punish all the perpetrators, no one would have survived—no one. As psalmist says we've all turned aside, all followed the corrupt ways of our own hearts, all made a mess of G's good world. So if J had come to execute judgment, we all die. But instead J let sword of judgment fall on him. What cross was all about. J dying so that broken might live, J absorbing punishment so that perps could be released, J entering darkness so that those in darkness might walk in light. & you know what you do when you find out this gos is for you? § *sing for joy* (10). *new song*: "fresh realization [of G's goodness] or a fresh display" always produces a new song (Motyer, 323–4). Ergo our new songs. A great joy last Sun to watch 4 longtime members w 5th pers new to our cong teaching the rest of us a new/old song ("What a Sav"). Grace! Not at all to minimize our injustice or excuse our sin, bc Serv's work isn't done w redemption. Remember: *in his teaching islands hope* (v 4). § Redeems & **transforms**, makes us new, changes how we treat 1A & world around us. By his Sp's work in us—same Sp that God put on J—

Serv transforms us to be more & more like him. Less & less like the broken/unjust/sinful peo we used to be, more & more like Serv, becoming his instruments to establish justice in the earth. Informing peo of what true justice looks like, seeking punishment for those who act unjustly, entering brokenness to bring X's healing to those on margins. § Ergo generous justice as a value for our church. Not simply showing mercy, but doing what is right, i.e., justice: § Zech 7.9–10. Note parallel bet two. Bc of who J is & what he's done & bc the Sp is making us to be like J, we follow in his steps & care for those society has forgotten §. Care for elderly, disabled, unborn, immigrant, sick, homeless, poor.

For some, this takes form of FT employment. One app of nobility of work §. If you think about it, all legit work is bringing order out of chaos, taking a mess & making it whole—from parenthood to board room, from food service to arts, from finance to politics. W/in that some professions are directly related to this kind of justice work: medicine, education, politics, law, Syria refugee crisis. Will Haney.

But more than just formal employment. A new way of life, seeking to care for those society has forgotten. § Mercy & justice team. Honestly as a church—& frankly most churches like ours—don't do a very good job at this. As I reflected on the state of our church this summer & planned those Sunday service teams, this was one area where I was very troubled. If someone comes into our church w a need—physical, emotional, spiritual—there's no obvious place for them to go. That's a huge problem. M&J team just a start: table set up in chapel after service, peo available to talk & pray. Reason hosp team is so imp! Might not be able to do much, but we have to start somewhere.

Detroit: lights coming on. But even when every light is turned out, city still won't be all it ought to be. Still waiting for day when all will be as it should But it will come. § v. 4. The work is his, not ours. So in him we will continue to put our hope.