

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Isaiah 42:1-9
Sermon Title: "The Determined Servant and Servants"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA
January 13, 2013

The offense finds itself on the two yard line. It's first down and goal to go. They decide to run the ball down the middle, but the fullback only picks up a yard. Second down. They try it again. Surely they can punch through the defense and score the touchdown. Once again, the offense is stopped cold. They plan to throw the ball on third down. The defense is on the receivers too quickly, and the quarterback has to throw the ball away. Fourth down and still one yard to go. The offense needs this touchdown, so they go for it. They are determined to gain the points they need. They believe they will score and win the game.

When we read Isaiah 42, we might think of a football game, in which our home team is down by five points, and there are only seconds left on the clock. They cannot win by kicking a field goal – that will only earn them three points. They need to score more than five points, and they can do it by scoring the touchdown. In Isaiah 42, we read determination in what the prophet says. We read drive and willpower.

Just as the home team will score that touchdown, God will send his Servant forward to bring justice to the nations.

Notice the verbs here. “Here *is* my servant,” the Lord says in verse 1. “I *will* put my Spirit on him and he *will* bring justice...”¹ We don’t read, “Well, God is thinking about it. He’ll get back to you later,” or “Here might be my Servant, and he could bring justice.” Here *is*, and he *will*. Period. Determination. Drive.

God is quite determined in his first words of Chapter 42, because the people of Israel are in a mess (what else do we expect?). Back in Isaiah 41, Isaiah talks about the idols that people hold onto. They cling to their idols as though they are the only things that can save them. Their idols may only make them happy. Their idols may only bring security and warmth. And the Lord challenges the power of those idols. The Lord demands the idols to talk about the past and the supposed glorious things they had done. Talk about the future, and how you will save the people from themselves. “Do something,” the Lord says to the idols, “whether good or bad, so that we may be dismayed and filled with awe.”²

The idols are false, however. They are dead. “You

¹ Isaiah 42:2.

² Isaiah 41:23.

are less than nothing,” the Lord says. “All you do – well, all that people expect you to do – is utterly worthless.” What idols do we hold onto, and even put our belief in? Money? Clothing? A car? Cellphones? Just take a cellphone away from somebody and watch them melt. Watch them crumble under a mountain of despair without direction or purpose. What about Internet access? You take away my Internet, and I don’t know what to do with myself. I can hardly communicate with people without the Web. What about the things we have, which we’ve work hard for? What about the things we could have? What are the idols we cling to, that if they were gone we would miss them terribly?

They are less than nothing. Their works are utterly worthless. Look here. Here *is* my servant, the Lord says. He *is* my Chosen One. He *is* the Answer to the plight of the world. He *is* the One who works through our sadness and frustration and hopelessness. Look to him. Clasp onto him.

“[My Servant] will not fail,” verse 4 says. Determination. “[My Servant will not] be discouraged.” Drive. The Servant of the Lord enters our human condition. He took on flesh and dwelled among us – we just celebrated that last Christmas. The Servant

experiences everything we experience: joy and peace, laughter and smiles. He also experiences all the bad we may encounter: sadness and pain, rejection and frowns. The thing about God's Servant is that even in the midst of failures, he will overcome. Even when things seem to be going terribly, the Servant will not fail. Cellphones will fail. Money will be spent. Things will be lost. The government may or may not solve problems of healthcare or taxes. People will disappoint us. Situations might crush us, squashing our courage and hope, but the Servant of the Lord will not be crushed. He is not discouraged by bad news or stopped by any event that might be hiding and waiting around the corner.

The Servant will always move forward. He is determined to bring about the will of God the Father. Justice will come. He will evaluate everything that we have done or said. He will correct what needs to be corrected, and he will reward that which needs to be rewarded. He will move from shore to shore – every square mile of the earth will see his justice. God's people will feel the effects of his grace and love and life.

In verse 4, some Bible translations give us the word *coastlands*, while others give us the word *islands*. The idea here is that coastlands and islands

might be remote, faraway lands that nobody can reach. They are not found on the beaten path, and there is no much civilization surrounding them. They are isolated

We might feel isolated. We might feel we are the only ones who are suffering, who are sad, who are going through a bad patch. Everyone else seems to be okay, while we are not. That is a lonely feeling, kind of like being on a deserted island with nobody else around. Isaiah assures us that the Servant of the Lord reaches us no matter where we might be. No matter what our state of mind is, no matter what our personal struggles might be, the Servant will not fail us. He is not discouraged by what discourages us, and he will right the wrongs and heal the hurts. Psalm 139:7 asks these questions, “Where can I go from your Spirit [O Lord]? Where can I flee from your presence?”³ The answer is, “Nowhere.” The Servant of the Lord is always present. “If I go up to the heavens,” Psalm 139 continues, “you are there.” We could take an airplane to its highest altitude, and the Servant is there. We could take a spaceship to Mars and start a colony there, and the Servant is there. “If I make my bed in the depths [the grave], you are there.” Even in death, the Servant is present. “If I rise on the wings of the

³ The following verses are Psalm 139:7-12.

dawn, [if I could flee from everybody I know and] settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me...” Surely we could be in the darkest, most depressing place of our lives, the lowest, the most regrettable situation of our existence, and “even the darkness will not be dark to [the Servant]; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.” No matter what our state of mind is, no matter what our personal struggles might be, the Servant will not fail us. He is not be discouraged by what discourages us. He will right the wrongs and heal the hurts. Determination. Drive.

Verse 2 tells us that, although the Servant of the Lord is determined, his determination is subtle. It is not assertive, bombastic, in your face. “He will not cry out,” verse 2 says. “He will not raise his voice, and cause his voice to ring out throughout the city streets.” The Servant of the Lord doesn’t need to advertise himself, especially when he has us as servants to advertise him. As determined as the Servant is to enter our situations and bring about God’s perfect will, he also has the drive to mold and shape us into servants who carry out God’s will. If the Servant is

going to restore all things to God's right order, he wants us to come on board and carry out that work alongside.

"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand. I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people as a light to the Gentiles."⁴ There is no sitting on the sidelines. There is no excuse such as, "I'm on vacation, I'm retired, I'm busy." God calls the nation of Israel to be servants. God calls us to be his servants to work with the Servant in opening blind eyes, so that people may see and know the Lord; in bringing out prisoners from their prisons, so they may live free from sin and free in God; in showing others the way out from darkness, because we do not live in darkness anymore. The work of the Lord is accomplished by the Servant through all of us. Justice spreads from one person to another, even to the remotest places, covering the entire land.

We are the eyes of the Servant, seeing needs. We are the hands of the Servant, lending help. We are the feet of the Servant, moving from one place to another. We are the mind of the Spirit, considering always the things of God. We are the mouth of the Servant, sharing vital, life-giving truth. The worldwide ministry of God doesn't happen without us. With us, God's

⁴ Isaiah 42:6.

ministry is far-reaching and successful. The Spirit that is in the Servant is the same Spirit within us. The light that shines in the Servant is the same light we carry and shine in all dark places. And the darkness cannot overcome our light.

Sometimes as servants we feel our ministry isn't working. It doesn't seem like we are being effective – we aren't making a dent in sin, and we seem to be no good to anybody. Sometimes we feel like not giving our best effort and giving up. We go back to verse 3, and Isaiah tells us that “a bruised reed [the Servant] will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish.” When we are down and out, the Servant of the Lord will not keep us down. When we feel useless or beyond repair like a bruised reed, the Servant will not break us anymore. When it feels as though we have no more energy to move on like a dimly lit fire, the Servant will not blow us out. He will mend us and support us. He will put a new fire in our bellies that will burn strongly and brightly.

Our enthusiasm is not damped, because God's work still needs to be done. Our determination is not lessened, because even when we do a little good for somebody it means a lot. God's Servant is restoring the earth – that work never stops. He is restoring the universe to its right order. We are being restored each

day to our right order – *that* work never stops – to the way we were meant to be as God’s image. Others will be restored along the way. They have been restored by what little we have done, and more will be restored like we are restored, and they will know and be awestruck by the Lord. Day is always dawning for us, and new things are always being done in and through us.

Assurance of Pardon:

In Christ, we are offered a new design for living: open hearts, abundant forgiveness, yearning to serve others, desire to be one with God. The old is gone, and a new life has begun. Accept Christ's sacrifice, and be healed of your sin. Through him you and I are forgiven - thanks be to God. Amen.