

“To Serve Man”

Isaiah 42:1-9

Series: *Love Came Down Week 3 Servant*

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This is God’s word.

The Servant of the Lord

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

This is what God the Lord says— the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

“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, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

“I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.

See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being

I announce them to you.” Isaiah 42:1-9

May God bless this reading of the Word.

On March 2, 1962 the Twilight Zone aired the episode titled, “To Serve Man.” It has often been

called one of the best episodes in the series. One April day spaceships arrive in various areas of the earth. The aliens, known as Kanamits, are large creatures, approximately 9 feet tall and 350 pounds. They announce to the United Nations their observations that the earth is plagued by war, hunger and catastrophes. “We want to share with you the peace and plenty – which we enjoy.” They leave behind a book written in their language and a cryptographer named Chambers is assigned the job of deciphering the book. Patty, a member of his staff, is able to translate the title of the book as, “To Serve Man.”

True to their word, the aliens end famine by making deserts flourish with food. They teach nations to make impenetrable force shields to prevent wars. Thanks to the Kanamits there is no more hunger, no war, and no needless suffering. They even begin offering transportation to go to their beautiful planet which is considered a utopia. So many of the earthlings sign up, there is a waiting list. Chambers himself is chosen. After being checked in, and weighed, he is walking up the stairs to the spaceship, when Patty shows up. She yells out, “Mr. Chambers. Don’t get on that ship. The rest of the book, “To Serve Man”, it’s, it’s... a cookbook!”

Their plan is not to treat us but to eat us. It isn’t a book about humanitarian aid. It’s a book of recipes for how to cook, and eat, man. The Kanamits claimed they had no ulterior motives. In the end it was all about their ulterior motives. They weren’t here to help man. They came to help themselves to man.

Do you ever feel like you are being used by people more powerful than you? Perhaps you have had, or have, a boss who takes advantage of your time and effort in order to advance themselves. Have you ever wanted to fight a large utility company, but decide the effort isn’t worth it because they have the resources to make it almost impossible to win? We purchase laptops, iPads, and iPhones because we believe we are using them to make our lives better. We become so reliant on them, they are actually using us. What possible reason is there for me to have this in my pocket as I am preaching today? Every advertisement makes the claim their product will help us and make our lives easier. Christmas commercialization is just as bad. Expectation, with a side helping of guilt, convince us to buy more than we should, or even need. Companies use the

celebration of Jesus' birth to make money and become more powerful.

And I am sure there are some who wonder what God's motives are. Why would the most powerful being in the universe need to help us? What does he want from us?

Here we are, just a few days before Christmas, and we are finishing up our four-week advent series. In the first three weeks, Pastor Doug illustrated Jesus as a Prophet, Priest, and King.

The previous three weeks made sense to me. They are powerful roles which would be expected of the Messiah. As a prophet, Jesus speaks to us for God. The Great High Priest provides us the bridge to a relationship with God. And a king was what the people of Israel were waiting for, and what we need to lead us. But now we come to a role which is confusing because it seems powerless - a servant. It isn't what we expect. God promised to deliver his chosen people. They were expecting the mighty king who would destroy their enemies.

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

God's spirit will be with this servant, and he is going to bring justice. That's what the people want to hear!

However, chapter 42 is identified as one of the four "Servant Songs" in the book of Isaiah.

"He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope." Isaiah 42:1-4

A gentle Messiah who doesn't break a reed or snuff out a candle? Many want a leader who will break things and snuff out their enemies. Why would God send a gentle and humble servant?

This is what God the Lord says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

"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,

to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. Isaiah 42:5-7

Why would God send us a gentle and humble servant?

Reason # 1 – To Save Us: He gave Jesus to us as a new promise from God, a covenant. On the first Sunday of every month at Woodside, we participate in the sacrament of communion.

Included during that sacrament is a reading from 1 Corinthians:

25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 1 Corinthians 11:25.

Reason # 2 – To Heal Us: Before coming back to Woodside in 2006, and renewing my relationship with Jesus, I used to have drastic mood swings. I would have highs in my life, but they were usually countered by lows which could last for days. It sometimes felt like this (arm signals up and down). Now I’m much more likely to have mood swings like this (more moderate swings). I contribute those changes to the healing Jesus does in my life.

Reason # 3 – To Teach Us: As Jesus did so many times in his short life, he flipped the tables and switched the roles we expected of the Messiah. He came as God’s Servant and became our servant. But he also taught us to serve others in the same way he served us. Several years ago, I asked my wife, Michelle, for a picture of Jesus for my birthday to hang in our home. When she asked me what picture I wanted, it was an easy choice for me. As many of you hopefully realize, this is a painting of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper.

The full story from the Gospel of John is in John 13, verses 1 to 17. Here is the part I want to share:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should

do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13:12-17

In the time of Jesus, the duty of washing feet was considered too menial a task for Jewish servants to do. It was a Gentile responsibility. The service Jesus provided emphasizes what he was teaching his disciples, and all of us. Nothing should be considered beneath us when it comes to serving, and loving, others. On one of the Dominican Republic mission trips, we held a worship service on the roof of the church we were building. During the service we had a foot washing. Americans washed Dominican feet and our Dominican hosts washed our feet. As we washed, we prayed. It was a powerful experience, and a little humbling. I'm not suggesting we wash people's feet on a regular basis, but there isn't any reason we can't help others on a daily basis.

I spoke earlier about ulterior motives. How do we know God doesn't have ulterior motives. How can we be sure Jesus wasn't a secret plant God sent to us, to use us like so many others try to do? He Suffered.

Chapter 53 is another of the four Servant Songs from Isaiah.

He was 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 pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

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. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:3-6

Someone using you is not going to go through the pain and suffering Jesus endured. A person who wants something might claim they would give up something important for your help or claim they would "take a bullet" for you. It is easy to say something like that. It is much harder to actually do it. And while a person might be willing to sacrifice themselves for a child or someone else they love, it is very unlikely they would do it for an acquaintance much less a stranger. Jesus not only suffered for us, he died for us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

He Took Our Sins

“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

Our relationship with God was blocked by our sins. As Doug mentioned two weeks ago, sacrifices had to be offered again and again every time we sinned. With the amount of sin by each of us, we would either not have much of a relationship with God, or we’d become broke under the cost of the sacrifices.

Unlike us, Jesus had no sin. It makes one of his final moments of the cross so painful to think about.

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) Matthew 27:46

There are some who believe this moment was the moment where Christ actually took on our sins, and because of those sins he had the first moment in his life where God was not present with him. The pain of not having the Father with him might have been as unbearable as the pain of his punishment and crucifixion.

He Makes our Life Better

When we are used by others, our lives often get worse while theirs get better – whether it is money, time, or even love. Christ makes our life better in many ways. He offers forgiveness when we make mistakes and gives us the power to forgive others. He makes our lives fruitful. We don’t seem to need as much when we have Him in our lives. We can find the good in so many places. And he gives us peace, comfort, joy, and love. What else do we need?

Because of past experiences, there are people out there, and maybe here as well, who are still skeptical. With everything God is giving, what does he want from us, and what is in it for him? That’s pretty simple.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Mark 12:30

This doesn't mean when it is convenient for you. It isn't a holiday, or a Sunday thing. It is always. It is building a relationship with God so you understand him, as he understands us. It isn't praying to him when you get up, or when you eat, or go to bed. I'm doing my best to create a habit a friend of mine taught me. He says every time he goes somewhere, to meet with somebody, or perform some task, he tries to spend time in prayer as a way of preparation, or thanks. The Apostle Paul goes even further,

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:31

We have love because God shared it with us. He wants us to bring it to others as well. Your family and friends, sure. Your neighbors, school mates, colleagues and associates as well. And

God wants us to share the love with strangers, and even enemies. Helping others in need is one way to love your neighbor. Sharing the Gospel and allowing others to see Jesus in the light which shines in you is a great way for others to see the light in you.

This is what God wants of us.

And what is God's motive? The same thing – He wants us to love him, as he loves us.

16 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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn

the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17

There was once a man who did not believe in either the virgin birth of Christ or the spiritual

meaning behind it and was skeptical even about God. He and his family lived in a farm community. His wife was a devout believer and diligently raised her children in the faith. He sometimes gave her a hard time about her belief and mocked her religious observances. all nonsense -- why would God lower himself and become a human like us? It such a ridiculous story, he said.

One snowy day, she and the children left for church while he stayed home. After they had departed, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire for the evening.

Then he heard a loud thump, something hitting against the window. And, still another thud. He looked outside but could not see anything. So, he ventured outside for a better view. In the field near his house, he saw, of all the strangest things, a flock of geese. They were apparently flying to look for a warmer area down south, but they had been caught in the snowstorm. The storm had become too blinding and violent for the geese to fly or see their way. They were stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter, unable to do more than flutter their wings and fly in aimless circles. He had compassion for them and wanted to help them. He thought to himself; the barn would be a excellent place for them to stay. It is warm and safe; surely, they could spend the night and wait out the storm. So he opened the barn doors for them.

He waited, watching them, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. Nevertheless, they did not notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them. He moved closer toward them to get their attention, but they just moved away from him out of fear.

He went into the house and came back with some bread, broke it up, and made a bread trail to the barn. They still did not catch on.

Starting to get frustrated, he went over and tried to shoo them toward the barn. They panicked and scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where there was warmth, safety, and shelter.

Feeling totally frustrated, he exclaimed,

“Why don’t they follow me?

Can’t they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm?

How can I possibly get them into the one place to save them?

He thought for a moment and realized that they would not follow a human. He said to himself, How can I possibly save them? The only way would be for me to become like those geese. If only I could become like one of them. Then I could save them. They would follow me, and I would lead them to safety.

At that moment, he stopped and considered what he had said. The words reverberated in his mind: If only I could become like one of them, then I could save them.

Then, at last, he understood God’s heart towards mankind, and he fell on his knees in the snow.

How about you? Do you understand why the Servant role, while surprising, was perhaps the most important role he filled. Jesus isn’t the Messiah we wanted or expected. He is the Messiah we need