

The Servant of Isaiah: The Servant Suffers for Sin
Isaiah 42:18-25
February 17, 2016
2nd Wednesday in Lent

Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. The Lord was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted; they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, "Restore!" Who among you will give ear to this, will attend and listen for the time to come? Who gave up Jacob to the looter, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey? So he poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him up, but he did not take it to heart.

There's a song from 1970 by Ray Stevens titled *Everything is Beautiful*. One line from that song says: *There are none so blind as he who will not see*. That line of the song sounds as if it could have been about the Servant of the Lord. The difference is, the Prophet is speaking about a sort of blindness of the Servant of the Lord that both leads to and flows from forgiveness. Our theme this evening is "The Servant Suffers for Sin".

Oddly enough, being blind and deaf is not entirely a bad thing in our text. It is an unfortunate condition, even spiritually, but God promises wonderful things for the blind and deaf. Just before our text, Isaiah says that God will rescue the blind and make the darkness light for them. He makes that promise and then says that He will not fail to do these things for them.

After that, our text begins with the invitation, and the command, that the deaf hear and the blind see. These prophecies are why Jesus healed the blind and the deaf. He wasn't just being a nice guy, He was identifying Himself as the Servant who was going to bear our sins and suffer awful things for us.

But the promise in our text was not merely about physical sight and hearing. Isaiah says: *He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear* (Is 42:20 ESV).

This is a spiritual issue. The people of Israel had seen and heard the Word of God and yet they act as if they had not. They didn't seem to recognize the promises nor did they trust God in spite of all that He had done for them and spoken to them.

They were spiritually blind and deaf. Even the threats of disaster had fallen on deaf ears. The troubles which God had rained down on them to awake them up to the danger of their situation didn't make them see or understand.

Then comes the Servant of God in the prophecy. He comes to take their weaknesses,

their failures, and their sins, and so He is blind and deaf too. But, it's not the same deafness, because the Servant knows God and trusts in Him. That is the nature of His blindness: *Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord?* (Is 42:19 ESV).

The Servant is at peace with God, and trusts in God, even while He is carrying the guilt of the nation and the sins of the whole world before God, and even though He will receive from the hands of God the punishment due those sins.

Still, the Servant trusts God and is at peace with God as though He doesn't know what's coming. It's the mirror image of the blindness of the people. They don't see or hear the love of God or His goodness, and the Servant acts as though He doesn't see the wrath of God about to fall on Him.

The blindness of the people leads them into greater sin, while the blindness of the Servant leads Him into even more glorious righteousness. *The Lord was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious* (Is 42:21 ESV).

Those words speak about the righteousness of Christ, perfect righteousness, which keeps the whole law. That holiness lifts up the Law and makes it glorious! It's in the face of that perfect holiness that the Servant will die, bearing sins that were not His own.

He died for us because we could not rescue ourselves: *But this is a people plundered and looted; they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, "Restore!"* (Is 42:22 ESV).

We had no hope in and of ourselves, there was no way for us to redeem or rescue ourselves. That's what Isaiah is saying here. We all stood guilty before the Lord: *Who gave up Jacob to the looter, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey?* (Is 42:24 ESV). Because of our stubborn blindness and deafness we stand justly condemned before the court of divine justice. God Himself is the prosecuting attorney.

But the Servant stepped in, blind to the wrath of God and deaf to the warnings of danger. It was on His own Servant that the Lord poured out His wrath over sin: *So he poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him up, but he did not take it to heart* (Is 42:25 ESV).

The sinless Servant suffered for sinful man. He endured the wrath of God and agonies of hell to be the One who rescues. He has become the One who delivers the helpless people and the One to demand that they be given back to the loving care of God the Father, and the One to stop God's people from being prey for the wicked.

Who is so blind that He is at peace with the Lord? It's the Servant of the Lord. Jesus had absolute peace with His Father, trusting Him implicitly and explicitly, and doing so in the face of what He knew lay ahead of Him. He faced God's wrath over our sins, and

still trusted in God and walked faithfully before Him all the days of His life and even on the cross.

That's the blindness of the Servant – the willful blindness of One who sees clearly but refuses to turn either to the left or to the right. He trusts God and loves God. He walks deliberately and unflinchingly into the suffering appointed for Sin. There are none so blind as He who will to see. *Who is so blind . . . as the servant of the Lord?*

The Servant of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, suffered just as Isaiah said He would for our sin and rebellion. We consider that glorious, willful blindness on our behalf this Lenten evening. Isaiah asks: *Who among you will give ear to this, will attend and listen for the time to come?* (Is 42:23 ESV).

We answer, we will! After all, faith comes by hearing. The story of ancient Israel was the story of a people who would not hear, who were deaf to God by choice. That deafness had to be answered by another deafness – the sort of deafness that refused to be turned away from God by anything.

Because our Lord was that Servant, He didn't listen to the fears or allow Himself to be frightened from His task by what He saw or suffered. The Servant of God suffered for our sins that we might be saved. May God help you to hear and believe and give thanks today.