

The Promised Savior's Joyful Obedience
Advent Sermon Series on Isaiah's Servant Songs

Luke 2:25-32; Isaiah 50:4-9

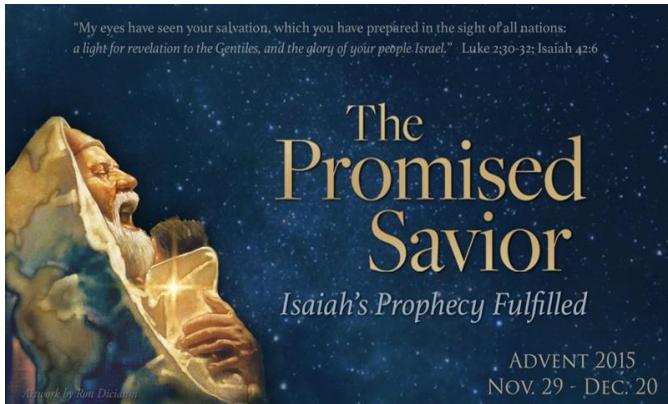
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

December 13, 2015

TEXTS: Luke 2:25-32; Isaiah 50:4-9

We continue this morning in our Advent series on the Promised Savior, Isaiah's Prophecy Fulfilled. The season of Advent helps to prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Christ.



These four weeks leading up to Christmas anticipate the arrival of our promised Savior who brings hope, love, joy, and peace to all who trust in Him. We have been looking at this riveting scene of the first Christmas where the devout Simeon holds the Infant Child Jesus in his arms and proclaims that this is the promised One. Simeon's words echo words that were spoken centuries

before, words that God given to His people through the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had been given a set of songs, or poems, describing the coming Redeemer, the coming Savior, and these songs are known as the Servant Songs. We have been looking at each one of them throughout the weeks of Advent, and so we come this week to the third of the Servant Songs. It is in this Servant Song that we hear the voice of the promised Savior speaking and articulating to us the joyful obedience that will characterize His mission. Jesus Christ comes in fulfillment of God's promise in perfect obedience to the Father. There is no salvation without Christ's perfect obedience, and this joyful obedience becomes a model for our own.

We begin this morning again with the scene of Simeon. Luke introduces us to this man whom we all wish we could have known personally. This is the kind of man that you wish was your uncle or your grandfather, a man who loves the Lord and are saturated in Scripture. That is how I imagine Simeon to be. Luke introduces us to him as a righteous and devout man, and Luke tells us specifically that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel, something very specific in Scripture. The comfort that God had promised to His people, this comfort that would come on the other side of exile, when God would return to His people. The Spirit of God is upon Simeon, and we realize that the comfort, the consolation of Zion, has everything to do with the promise

of the Savior. We read about Simeon in Luke 2:26:

"And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."

The comfort and consolation of Israel is inextricably linked with the arrival of the Messiah Himself. There is no comfort in Zion without the arrival of the messianic King. We saw in our fall study that God had foreseen that His people would make it into the land and that their life would be characterized by disobedience. Just as our ancestors Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were driven out of the Garden, the place of God's presence, so the nation would be driven out from the land into the place of exile, removed, taken away, and the cause, just as in the Garden, was the sin of the nation. So it begs the question, if sin drives us away from the presence of God, what is the remedy for our sinfulness? Here we discover the heart of the mission of the Servant of the Lord.

The Bible does not end with exile, but God promises that He will return and act again decisively, announcing a word of comfort in Isaiah 40:1:

"Comfort, comfort My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."

God will make provision for the forgiveness of His people. Our sins will be forgiven. The Lord promises a recompense, and we will see, as we follow the Servant Songs all the way through to the climactic fourth one, that it will be the Servant Himself who will carry our sins. This morning, we look again at the Servant closely. The first of the Servant Songs, Isaiah 42, announced the hope of Israel. The Servant comes in humility and emerges as the delight of the Father. He will exercise His office with compassion and tenderness. The world is waiting for Him, and God promises these things in advance. In the second Servant Song, Isaiah 49, which we considered last Sunday, we saw that the Servant of the Lord was prepared in God's love for the world and for His own people. The servant was called from the womb, named even in the womb, prepared like a sharpened sword, an arrow polished, awaiting the moment to be sent forth into the world. God has a mission for the Servant, not only to restore the tribes of Israel, but to be a light unto the nations. This light for all nations would have the effect of God's salvation reaching to the ends of the earth.

When we see Simeon in that first Christmas season celebrating Christ, celebrating this infant Redeemer, he lifts Him in his arms and says in Luke 2:30-32:

"My eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel."

This morning, we turn to the third of the Servant Songs in Isaiah 50:4-9. The Servant of the Lord speaks to us about His own joyful obedience, a challenge for all who follow in His footsteps. The Servant of the Lord articulates the nature of His mission as it is reflected in the character of this person. Isaiah's third Servant Song presents the voice of the Servant, suggesting to us, compelling us forward, that the life that results in happiness and joy is a life that is characterized by obedience to God. The Servant begins in Isaiah 50:4 with the announcement:

"The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary."

We discover that joyful obedience to God is something that is acquired, something that is learned. This is the language of discipleship, and it is something that is very difficult for contemporary people like ourselves where our culture predisposes us against this very idea. We live in a society in which our own attention spans and expectations are shortened. Eugene Peterson writes about this in a very profound book called *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. Peterson says:

"One aspect of the world which is harmful to Christians is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We assume that if something can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently, and our attention spans have been conditioned, our sense of reality has been flattened. In our kind of culture, anything can be sold if it is packaged freshly, but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world, little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness."

What Peterson so wisely recognizes is that we live in a society that thinks anything that can be done, should be done, can be done, quickly and efficiently. Yet, when we are honest, the things that matter most are acquired over a long patient commitment. Things that matter, like loving the people around you, like being a committed parent, identifying the gifts of your spouse, can be learned with patient instruction. If you want to learn to play an instrument, there are hundreds of hours of practice underneath it. If you want to shoot a jump shot well, there are thousands of shots behind that. Even something like learning to use chopsticks requires patient instruction. I remember when I first arrived in China, there were no forks in the nation, at least that I could find. One of the first things I was ever served was an appetizer of peanuts. I thought, "I'm hungry, and I have these sticks, and they are small, round objects. How will I feed myself?" But I learned after hours of practice! Things that matter require patient commitment, long obedience in the same direction. The Servant of the Lord speaks, and he says in Isaiah 50:4 that He has the tongue of those who have been taught. I want to be someone who has been taught the ways of God. I want that for all of us here. We need that patient instruction. How does a long obedience begin, and what are its regular practices? That is what I want to consider

this morning. This is like having a discipleship class with Jesus Christ Himself. I want to be in that class! This is Jesus speaking. How do you acquire the tongue of learned as He mentions in verse 4? How do you sustain those who are weary with the word? There are five things that we see in this song.

The first is in the second half of Isaiah 50:4. The Servant speaks and says there is ***daily, morning prayer***. The Servant of the Lord says:

“Morning by morning He awakens; He awakens My ear to hear as those who are taught.”

Morning by morning; day by day the Servant of the Lord says that He is stirred and that God awakens His ears to hear. Our growth in faith and faithfulness must begin here with a renewed commitment to daily morning prayer. John Bunyan said:

“He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day.”

Pastor Scott mentions one of his heroes of faith who said very concisely and powerfully:

“No Bible, no breakfast.”

I've been thinking this week: “No prayer; no paper.” Although it doesn't have the same punch, it's the same idea. I was talking with a close friend and I said, “You know, I'm renewing my own discipline to make sure that the first thing I check in the morning is not my phone. The first thing I want check in the morning is a word from the living God, to open my mind, open my heart, and hear from God.” What I've discovered in my own refreshed, renewed commitment to this is that the first half of Isaiah 50:4 really proves true, that the word that you acquire from God in the morning is then available to you throughout the day as the very word that you give away. For years, I thought I should have morning devotion time to stir my own spirit, and now I am realizing afresh that actually the word that I receive in the morning is a word that God gives me to give away throughout the rest of the day. Can you imagine driving into work with your gas tank empty? Can you imagine trying to turn on your computer with no battery power? Many of us try to live a spiritual life with no input at the first breath of the day. The Servant of the Lord stands at the gate of dawn to say: “Morning by morning He stirs Me; He awakens Me, and He awakens my ear.” Isn't that great! The first thing you need is not speaking. The first thing you need is ears. John Wesley said:

“Prayer is where the action is.”

Corrie ten Boom said:

“Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees.”

Do you believe that? If you want to be a person of strength, then get down on your knees before Almighty God as the first step of the day. Every activity depends on prayer for its

ultimate efficiency.

Number two: What does this Servant teach us this morning about this joyful obedience? He teaches us that we should ***put into practice what we hear from the Lord***. Notice Isaiah 50:5:

"The Lord GOD has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward."

In other words, the Servant says: "I met with My heavenly Father; He spoke to Me; I had an open ear. And guess what? I took it in, and I put into practice. I didn't rebel against the word of the Lord, and I did not turn the other way." The Septuagint translation of Isaiah 50:5 renders these words: "I was not disobedient, and I did not contradict." I love that. You know, our children often go through this phase of development where anything the parent will say, it's contradicted. That sounds bad; it has a bad effect on your life and creates family tension. The disciple's heart says: "Lord, You speak to me, and I do it. I obey." I don't ask for a qualifying statement. I don't seek further explanation. I don't ask for attendant circumstances. The Lord speaks; I take it in; I put it into practice. I'd rather fall on my face trying to obey God than stumble in the midst of generating contradictions or turning the other way. In Psalm 40:6 the Lord says:

*"In sacrifice and offering You have not delighted, but You have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required."*

This is the text that is quoted in the passage read at the beginning of the service. The Hebrew idiom of Psalm 40:7 is more vivid than "you've given me an open ear." The Hebrew idiom says literally: "You cut ears for me." Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that God that our heavenly Father, our Creator, comes in with a divine auger and just drills in and creates two nice openings in the skull? That's the image, and you think that with anyone but God, you would be afraid of that. But God our heavenly Father says: "The first thing you need is to close your mouth and let Me open a couple of ears." The central imperative to Israel is: Hear; listen. *Shema*, listen. The word for obedience is connected etymologically with hearing. You can't obey unless you hear. Not only does the Servant put into practice what He hears from the Lord, the Servant draws us in closer to a vision of discipleship and following.

Number three: ***Embrace a costly vision of discipleship; this is the secret of the Kingdom.*** This is so counterintuitive. You and I are inclined to reject this. We are inclined to think there is another way, and yet, the Servant of the Lord speaks and says: "Real discipleship is costly; it involves suffering." In Isaiah 50:6, the Servant says:

*"I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I hid not My face from disgrace and spitting."*

The Servant of the Lord announces that real discipleship will be costly. It will be costly in this

world; it will be costly at first glance to our own passions and desires. Yet, as we follow the text forward, we will see there is real life at the end. Jesus Himself says in Matthew 8:34:

"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

Discipleship starts with a great "NO" in order that life might really begin. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 7:14:

"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Jesus says in Matthew 10:25:

"It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household."

Jesus says again in John 15:20:

"A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

We should expect hostility and difficulty in obeying God in this world. It should be part of our expectations. It should not surprise us.

The atmosphere is changing rapidly in our society. The default position of our society is no longer nominal Christian. Christianity looks increasingly strange to our society; it looks increasingly dangerous to our society. It is viewed in an increasingly negative light. Our own City Council passed legislation this week making it so that any counselor will be fined every day for giving counsel to someone struggling with same-sex attractions. So it is illegal now in Cincinnati to counsel someone who may be struggling, and it will be illegal for a licensed counselor to cite 1 Corinthians 6 and say you can struggle with this or you could consider another way. You get \$200 a day fine for that counsel in Cincinnati, starting Wednesday. An assistant football coach, Joe Kennedy, was recently fired from Bremerton High School in Washington because of his practice of praying at the 50 yard line after a game, voluntarily, for a couple of minutes, with players who wanted to join him. It is something he has done for years. It was not an organized event. It was just a way of saying "Thank You, God, for the gift of being able to compete, for watching over our bodies" with players who wanted to. The school board said: "You can't do that anymore." Joe said: "That shouldn't be illegal," and they said: "You can't work here anymore." The Fire Chief of the city of Atlanta, Kevin Cochran, was recently fired because he wrote a book, on his own time, for his own faith community. He is a member of a Baptist church in Atlanta, and Kevin Cochran's story is a powerful story about someone growing up in

abject poverty and becoming the fire chief of the city, an office that he'd held with distinction. He wrote a book, a small book, trying to empower men for faithful living, to be committed to their families, and to exercise marital fidelity. He described a biblical view of intimacy and sexuality in this book. He wasn't passing the book out at work; he wasn't requiring his employees to read it; and yet a member of the City Council of Atlanta was upset, and Kevin Cochran was required to go to sensitivity training for 30 days, and then he was dismissed. Kevin Cochran said:

“Atlanta is symbolic of a growing threat Christians face in this nation. That's the position the city of Atlanta has taken — that I have to make a choice, to live out my faith or to keep my job.”

Expect hostility. Expect it. Don't be afraid of it. Expect it. We see that the Servant of the Lord has a powerful word immediately after this announcement that discipleship is costly.

Number four: The Servant of the Lord instructs us that we must ***resolve beforehand to obey God.*** He reminds us in Isaiah 50:7:

“But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”

You can't decide in the moment to obey God. If you are waiting for the moment of testing, you will fall. The Servant reminds us: “I have resolved in advance. I have set my face like a flint.” So, we read in the New Testament that Jesus endured the cross, despising its shame. We read that God says: “I lay in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, and whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame.” The idiom of Isaiah 50:7 of setting His face like a flint reflects an inner resolve and commitment, an unswerving decision to obey God whatever the cost may be. I was delighted this week when I realized that the Septuagint of Isaiah 57 is exactly like Luke 9:51:

“When the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

Luke's Gospel is 24 chapters long, and in chapter 9 we read that when the days drew nearer, Jesus set His face to Jerusalem. We are not even halfway through the Gospel and Jesus is resolved to go to the cross. He has committed Himself to costly, joyful obedience to the Father already in chapter 9. The Servant commits Himself to joyful obedience in Isaiah 50 long before we get to chapter 53 next week. The Servant resolves to obey God whatever the cost.

Number five: The lesson from the Servant of the Lord is to ***await God's vindication.*** Never seek your own. The Servant sets His face to a joyful obedience and then waits for God's vindication, God's action in the end. Jesus goes to the cross willingly, joyfully, and it is God who raises Him up in the end, God declares Him the Son of God in power through His resurrection in the end. The Servant announces His confident resolve in God because He knows in Isaiah 50:8:

"He who vindicates Me is near. Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near to Me."

I just love this term: "God who declares me to be in the right." It is a courtroom scene where Christians look to be all in the wrong, and that will increasingly be the case. You seem an intolerant group. You are the ones responsible for depression and suicidal thoughts in other people, because you are not affirming. You are the ones who are dangerous for society, because you are not including everyone. Christian commitment will seem increasingly bizarre and hard to understand. Yet, it is God who brings vindication in the end. The Servant says: "He who vindicates Me is near; who will bring a charge against Me? Let's stand together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near." In Isaiah 50:9, He continues:

"Behold, the Lord GOD helps Me; who will declare Me guilty?"

Kevin Cochran's case is being tried in the upper courts of our country even now. Kevin Cochran said: "God is going to vindicate me in a way that everyone will see, and everyone will know that it is only the most high God who is vindicating me." He is not jumping up and down. He is not accusing his accusers. He is just saying: "God is going to vindicate me." The city of Atlanta did an investigation searching to find if he had behaved in a way that was discriminatory, and they couldn't find anything. He just has his hands open and says the Lord will vindicate him in the end. That gives us a resolve to obey God. It brings us into the heart of obedience, this long hard pull of obedience that brings life in the end. The Servant knows that His accusers are the ones who perish in the end. Isaiah 50:9 ends with a twist of this final song that God will come and vindicate Me. He surveys His accusers at the end of the story:

"Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up."

He sees them with tattered rags and garments devoured by moths. It is a stunning picture of reversal in the end. As powerful as one's accusers may seem in any contemporary moment, in the end, those who take their stand against the Lord will end up in filthy rags. This should fuel our compassion and confidence in God. The Servant of the Lord has much to teach us about this long, joyful obedience in the same direction. It is the Servant whom Simeon holds in his arms in Luke 2, the promised One. It is of the Servant of the Lord that Simeon lifts his eyes toward heaven says in Luke 2:29-32:

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel."

As we continue in the Gospel narrative, we see that Jesus is the promised Servant, the promised Savior. Christopher Wright says:

"It is clear from his baptism, through his public ministry, and especially in his suffering

and death, that Jesus saw himself as fulfilling the mission of the Servant of the Lord. The more deeply we understand the scriptures Jesus used, the closer we shall come to the heart of Jesus himself. And what is more, we shall have a sharper understanding of our own mission in the light of his. The spirit of servanthood, written into the prophetic vision of the Servant, lived out in the ministry of Jesus, should be the motive and the method of all Christian mission.”

This life of discipleship that we find in Isaiah 50 is a job description of the Servant's own walk, and so it is for us: “Morning by morning, awaken me, O Lord. Help me to apply what I hear from You daily. Help me embrace a costly vision of discipleship; help me resolve in advance to obey God, and trust God in the end for vindication, and never to retaliate with my own clenched fists.” Can we embrace this as community this morning? If so, the mission that is launched with Jesus the Servant of the Lord will continue among us as His people this morning. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, You are awesome. You are amazing, and we see You so clearly in Isaiah 50. I pray, Father, that You would renew us this morning. Renew us, Lord, to embrace a long obedience in the same direction. Help us, Lord Jesus, to recalibrate our affections. Help us, Lord, to understand discipleship in a society of instant gratification. Father, for some of us this will just mean refreshing a morning commitment to seek You first, even for five minutes, to pick up from You a word to sustain those around us throughout the day. Lord, for others, we need Your help to put into practice what You have taught us already, and to really do what You have said, not to contradict or rebel. For some of us, Lord, we need to embrace a costly discipleship. Some of us just imagine that following You will be easy. We don't know what to do with cultural hostility that scares us. Help us to embrace this, Lord. Help us resolve beforehand to obey You and seek Your help and Your vindication in the end. We love You, Lord Jesus, and we ask that You would help us. Lord, help Kenwood Baptist Church to join the Servant mission in the world today.

In Jesus Name we pray this; in Jesus we believe. Hallelujah! Amen.