

Title: He's got the whole world in his hands.
Text: Isaiah 41.1-42.12
Theme: God's sovereign grace
Series: Isaiah #35
Prop Stmt: God exercises his sovereignty in order to manifest his mercy.

In order to help us understand what we are going to be studying this morning, I want to use an example that happens to parents, teachers and to people who are in positions of authority. But, before I use the example, I need to say something to the kids. Here goes:

Kids, the parents that God has given you are not perfect. We wish we were, but we're not. We make commitments that we cannot always keep because sometimes things happen that are beyond our control. Other times there are warnings or even threats that we give that we do not want to keep. For example, let's say that your parent said, "if you do not do your get at least a "B" on your biology test, then you will lose your cell phone for a week." Now an experienced parent will stipulate in very clear terms what is meant by a "b". A "b" is not a c plus, nor is it a b minus. It is a "b". In fact, you may need to document this, write it out and have it signed with witnesses; perhaps a notary would be handy. Why, is your parent having this conversation with you? Do they want you to be off of your cell phone? No. If they did not want you to have a cell phone, they wouldn't be paying \$40 a month for it. No, they want you to do well in biology. They want you to develop good study habits. They want you to learn to use your time wisely and make the connection between sacrifice now for gain later. Now, let's say that the night before your biology test, your dog gets loose, and runs away and you spend two hours finding him. Then you get the flu and you spend most of the night sick as you can be, but in spite of that, you really try to study. You sleep awful, but you are determined to go to school and take this test anyway, which you do, and, you get a B minus. What is your parent supposed to do? He has made a promise and he has to fulfill it – right? Otherwise he lied. But, at the same time, he's looking at the fact that you demonstrated responsibility, maturity and perseverance. That is what he wanted to see all along. And now, he's caught between keeping his word (and breaking his heart and discouraging you) or breaking his word and making it appear as if he can change his mind.

Do you remember the prophet Jonah? Jonah lived about 50 years before Isaiah. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Jonah took a while to get there, but eventually he did. And when he did, he began to preach, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Then, something unimaginable happened. The people listened to the guy preaching God's Word! Imagine that! And Jonah becomes angry at God because after 40 days God did not bring judgment. The people repented and Jonah is ticked and he accuses of God of being merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and (note this) "relenting from disaster." (Jonah 4.2) But, wait a minute. Didn't God tell Jonah to say to Nineveh that in 40 days they were going to be overthrown? So, did God not tell the truth? In Jeremiah 18, God explains why he directs his prophets to give warnings.

Jeremiah 18.5-11.

God's purpose in sending his prophets is not to simply predict the future, but to awaken people to see the condition of their hearts. If people repent, God is happy to relent from disaster. He loves to be merciful. God looks for a reason to be merciful. Even when he is warning of judgment, he is doing so, for the purpose of moving people to repentance. On the other hand, the person who presumes upon God's goodness and uses God's blessings as an excuse for sin will find that God reserves the right to relent of his promise to bless and instead will bring down the house on the person in order for them to trust in God.

Now, here in Isaiah, there is another wrinkle that this text puts before us and it is another example of both the Sovereignty of God and the great extent of the mercy and compassion of God. Here God is again going on record, explaining beforehand what is going to happen (unless, the people repent – which they do not). He anticipates what they are going to be thinking when the devastating consequences of their rebellion come crashing down upon from all over. Now, follow the argument. What are the devastating consequences? The enemies of Judah (the Babylonians) are destroying their land, their cities and taking many of the people into exile, leaving only the poor and disenfranchised left to till the land. So, what would be the natural focal point of the people's fear? Who would cause the people to be frightened? It would be the Babylonians. But God is telling them NOT to fear the Babylonians, or any other nation. The Babylonians, like the Assyrians before them, were only tools in the hand of God. The only reason why the Babylonians are here is because you have rejected me. You have continually rejected me, so I am bringing down the house upon you, but the reason I am doing this, is so that you will see the connection between rebellion and devastation. Your problem is not the Babylonians or the Medes and Persians who follow. Your problem is with me. Turn to me and be saved. I will rescue you.

Read Text: Isaiah 42:1-9

I. **Your way is not hidden from me. (41.1-20)**

A. *I rule the nations. (41.1-7)*

God is saying here that your enemy (that is these other nations) is my rod of correction for your good. These verses describe the courtroom of God where presents himself as judge, jury, bailiff and prosecutor. He summons the nations to gather near for judgment, but when they gather, they are not permitted to speak. He presents the evidence that he is in charge and that the nations are tools in his hands to accomplish his plan. The evidence he presents is history that he has ordained. These are events that have fulfilled that which he revealed ahead of time through his prophets. Verse 2 speaks of one who is stirred up from the east. This ruler arises like a storm and conquers everything that it is in his path. The nations and empires that stand in his way are terrified and in anticipation of his army, they are in a panic making gods and idols to which they try to assure themselves that they will do the job. (5-7) It's pathetic! They have no hope! What a joke! It is like telling the 6-year olds on your little league team, who are about to face Justin Verlander that they are going to do just fine. Later on, we will see that this is probably a reference to Cyrus,

the ruler of the Medo-Persian empire who issued the edict that the Jews could return to their land and rebuild their cities. Well, why can't the Medo-Persian gods claim that it is their influence that gave Cyrus such powers? Well, and this is heart of the entire argument, God is going on record before hand to say what is going to happen. Later, (45.1) God calls Cyrus by name, 200 years before he is the king! God then asks and then answers the obvious question in his own courtroom (v.4). Do you see how this all fits together? God is saying that his own people should not fear the other nations and their gods, but that the other nations and their gods fear him!

Now, go back up to verse 1. Notice that God is speaking to the nations who are attempting to "renew their strength." These people are hopelessly attempting to renew their strength by making gods who will act for them, instead of waiting and relying upon God (40.31) who provides for those who really trust. Your way is not hidden from God. He has every thing under control, including the nations. Not only that, but...

B. You are still my people. (41.8-20)

"Fear not", God says. I am with you. I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you. I am the one who helps you. I am your Redeemer. Here is God, calling his people to rest in him and assuring them that he is their protection. God is saying (9) I called you into existence as a nation from the ends of the earth. Therefore, even though you are scattered from your land due to your rebellion, I will gather you. I will not lose you nor forget you.

Beloved, do you see what this text is saying? This is difficult to fathom. God is going on record and saying, even though you are faithless and have forgotten me, I have not forgotten you. I will restore you. Your sin, though serious and deserving of my judgment will not be my final word. I will rescue you. I will redeem you. This is what the entire book of Isaiah is about. God is going to redeem his people. (14) This is the first time this word appears in Isaiah. We will see it 13 more times. Here the gospel again is predicted. God himself is going to rescue his people from himself. God is going to redeem them by taking for them, the judgment that they deserve. This is incredibly humbling. God will do whatever it takes to rescue us from his wrath, even before we have decided how we are going to respond to him.

The picture of verse 13 is beautiful. Every child dreams of having a father who is both strong and compassionate. We want a dad who is so tough that he will take on any challenge and conquer it, and at the same time be tender to his children. No dad does that perfectly, but God does. Here he is holding his child (children) by their right hand while he defeats the enemy. The child is with him. The child is protected by him. This section ends with a beautiful poetic description of the rescue that God provides for his people. How can you explain the nation of Israel? How can you explain a people, who have been scattered and gathered, scattered and gathered, who have gone through so much, been hunted down, hated, the recipients of ethnic cleansing attempts time and time again, and not only survive, but now, even in our day are back in the land. It really is amazing.

II. Your cause is not disregarded by me. (41.21-42.9)

A. I am showing my superiority to the idols. (41.21 -29)

Now, God throws down the gauntlet. The gods and nations that he summoned to come to his courtroom in silence are now commanded to speak and provide evidence that they are true gods. But, seriously what do you expect an idol to say?

1. What idol can predict the future? (41.21-24)

Have you ever read fortune cookies, or read astrologist predictions? Have you ever noticed how incredibly banal and predictable they are? I looked up a few of them this week. Here is an example of what I mean. This is an astrologists' prediction about what you can expect (if you were born between Mar 20 and April 20) in relationship to money.

"There appears to be a lot activity on the financial front but money could be a source of tension if you feel others are making too many demands, overcharging you or dragging their heels about giving you your due. If you're not careful you may even find yourself in a situation where there's more going out than coming in or it goes out faster than it arrives. Therefore managing your cash flow creatively is key as is curbing your enthusiasm to get the latest 'must have.' Fortunately, there'll be times when you'll be well rewarded for your time and energy but you'll want to put some of that away rather than use it to get yourself out of a hole."

What a joke! When God goes on record he is specific. He calls Cyrus by name. He states that the Jews will be in exile for 70 years. He predicts by name, the city in which the Messiah would be born, the city where he would be raised, the way he would be treated and the manner in which he would die. He then turns to the impostaers posing as prophets or the idols, posing as gods and says – match me!

2. What idol can do what I do? (41.24-29)

Here is it – (24)! Behold, you are nothing! (29) Your works are nothing. So, now, in contrast to the gods of this world that have nothing to say and have no authority and no capacity to be able to act, God shows what he is doing for his people.

What is the appeal of horoscopes or to other promises of knowing the future that do not come from God? Is it not the comfort of knowing that what you are doing is going to be met with success? But, over and over we see that idolatry, like horoscopes and the like do not produce comfort, but produce bondage. Some of you know people who will not make any decision unless they consult their horoscope or astrologist. Instead of being free, they live in fear. But, let's take it a step further. How can idols, predict the future? In order to be able to determine the future, one has to be connected to the past. That is the entire point of astrology. You watch for patterns in the stars. When the stars line up a certain way, then certain things are bound to happen – why? Because that is what happened before. In other words, the past determines the future. Ok then, is this not absurd? As

Isaiah points out repeatedly, people are the ones who create (make) the idols. How can an idol know the past, when the idol has a beginning? And if an idol does not know the past, then it has no hope of knowing the future. The conclusion of the matter is presented in v.29 with the word, “behold”. Look at this! These idols are a delusion. Note how 42.1 begins. Isaiah is staging a contrast between the do nothing, know nothing, are nothing idols and the chosen Servant God who will rescue God’s people.

B. *I am showing the superiority of my Servant (42.1-9).*

1. He is not like your kings or idols. (42.1-4)

This passage is quoted in Matthew 12 because it is fulfilled by Christ. Here in the OT, Isaiah is contrasting the kings of the earth and the idols of this world with the only true, eternal King, who is one and the same with the only true and eternal God. By the way, this OT gives us a hint of the Trinitarian nature of God. All three are presented in v.1. The Father has not only chosen this servant (His Son) to lead his people, but he describes him as the one “in whom my soul delights.” I speak of this truth often, but I fear, not often enough. For this one truth, perhaps more than anything else is the very grounding of the gospel. Within the relationship of God, the Father, Son and Spirit, known as the Godhead, there is infinite joy and unbridled delight. The Father delights in the Son. The Son, from eternity past has given and continues to bring the Father infinite pleasure. Our God is holy, our God is righteous, our God is Sovereign, our God is all-powerful, our God is majestic, our God is omni-present, and we need to know and understand all of that. But, what is often lost, and when we lose it, it is to the demise of our condition, but what we often forget is that our God is absolutely, eternally and infinitely happy and full of joy because of the joy that God enjoys as God. God derives infinite pleasure from the love that is given and received as God! Behold your God! This is your God Judah! This is your God Cornerstone. This is your God – world. He is a God who is delighted with his Servant. His Servant gives him eternal reason for joy. Do you see why this is so critical to understand as the grounding for the gospel and why this truth stands in such eternal contrast to the kings and the idols of this world?

Let me explain. The kings of this world rule through political or military power. In order to get respect, they have to be feared. Like the Assyrians and Babylonians, the one who is stirred from the east (41. 2, 25) will trample on kings, and will destroy about everything in his path. But, the Servant that God delights in, will not cry aloud, will not be boisterous, or walk with a swagger. This mighty one, this powerful one, who can crush the mountains, will not even break a bruised reed, nor take advantage of a wick that is about to go out and extinguish it. In other words, he, though infinitely powerful, will not use his strength to crush the weak, but will use his strength to care for the weak. Not only that, but he will never grow weak. That is, he will never change. He is worthy of, deserving of your absolute unwavering faith. We see that here in this text, but later on in the NT we find out even more as to why this is the case. This Servant is so completely perfect in his life and in his death on the cross is the full and final, satisfying, wrath appeasing substitutionary offering to the Father, that God has now accepted Christ (in whom he delights) as the one who lived and died in your place. When you trust in Christ

as your Savior, you are credited with the righteousness of Christ. You are counted as being “in Christ.” When you are “in Christ” you are in the One and counted as being one and the same as the one “in whom God’s soul delights. The grounding for your forgiveness is NOT because of how sorry you are, how perfectly worded your prayers are, how perfectly you fulfill your vows to never stumble again. The grounding for your forgiveness and the reason why there is forgiveness in Christ and only in Christ, and why it is so certain and so unshakeable is because God the Father delights in His Son and the Son delights in the Father. That means that the Godhead is a loving community. God’s delight in being God and the Father’s delight in the Son and the full acceptance of his death for us is what sets us free. Your confidence in your spiritual condition does not come from how strong your faith is, or how perfect your performance is, but in the absolutely perfect merits of Christ. This is the Servant of Isaiah 42. This is all-mighty One who uses his omnipotent strength to defend the poor in spirit and bring salvation to the humble and contrite. Trust in Him alone – there is no other! Our God and only our God saves!

2. He is my agent to accomplish my plans. (42.5-9)

These final verses are simply incredible. Here is God, the Father singing (?) to his Son and affirming all that Christ is going to accomplish for his people. His servant is going to be a covenant for the people and a light for the nations. The Servant is going to have an impact upon the entire world that results in people being set free from their sin. This is not only something that no other god can do (8), but this is something that puts the glory of God on display like no thing else. And so, this challenge, by God, to the idols to predict the future, is concluded with God laying out what he is going to accomplish through the sending of his Servant to accomplish the salvation of people from all over the world. This is why God will not share his glory.

Conclusion: Bottom line: I am using your rebellion as an opportunity to demonstrate my mercy to the world. It does not make your rebellion less rebellious. It does not make the devastation of the enemy less sinful, but it does show that even rebellion and its consequences are not sovereign; God is sovereign and God is merciful! Therefore, God’s sovereign mercy wins the day! God’s mercy upon his people will have the final word. What is our response? Worship (v.10)