

Title: There's no god like our God. pt.1  
Text: Isaiah 42.1 – 42.25  
Theme: The undisputed uniqueness of God  
Series: Isaiah #36  
Prop Stmt Since there is no God, but God, it is ludicrous to hope in anything else.

Read Text:

Two years ago a man in New Zealand was diagnosed with terminal cancer. So, he quickly made a “bucket list” and attempted to do some things that had always wanted to do before he died including taking his wife to a resort in Fiji where he basically spent most of his savings. He operated a handyman business and so he also gave away about \$25,000 in tools. Then, he waited to die, but every day he woke up feeling as good as he did the day before. He then found out, after spending all of his savings that he had been misdiagnosed. He wasn’t going to die, after all, at least for a while. So now, he is going to live, but apparently can’t afford to. We certainly do not want people telling us bad news that isn’t true. But that usually is not our problem. Many people are not willing to hear bad news even if it is true.

Let’s say that you are a doctor. A patient comes to you and describes the nature of his problem, hoping that you will tell him that it is “no big deal” or that you can give him a prescription and he can go on with life and will be just fine. But, as you conduct your exam and tests, you realize that his condition is a serious matter. But now, you are in a dilemma. If you tell him the truth about how he is living and the obvious consequences of his decisions, you risk losing him as a patient because he does not want to hear that. He wants a doctor who will tell him what he wants to hear, not what he needs to hear. You also know that there are doctors who are willing to go along with their patients because if they don’t they will lose them as customers. So, what do you do? If you tell him the truth, he will probably drop you as his doctor, and you have bills to pay. You need him. On the other hand, if you do not tell him the truth, then are you really being a doctor?

Good doctors are always at risk of losing a patient who does not want to hear the truth. But, if you are unwilling to tell a person the truth, then, you have no ground upon which to tell them the solution. If you fail to diagnose the problem, then does the patient really have a reason to follow your advice? So, here is the dilemma. God’s Word reveals the fact that we have a serious problem that is due to our sin. Our sin has so thoroughly corrupted us that it affects everything about us. But, that truth is offensive. So, we are tempted to find ways in which we soften that, or sort of hide it from public view because we are afraid that it will cause some people to reject the church (or us) and we want to reach people. So, often, the desire to reach people becomes the occasion for watering down the straight up gospel. Watering down the gospel, rounding the sharp edges of the truth is what creates what we call “liberal Christianity.” Liberal Christianity, at its heart is the attempt to rescue genuine Christianity from deep embarrassment. You get it all the time, don’t you? A person looks at you with pity, like you are some Neanderthal, or pre-human being when they find out that you actually believe that any person who does not trust in Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior is condemned to hell. Sin, guilt, condemnation, judgment, hell, and righteousness have not only been banished from public discourse, they are being ignored in

the church. They are too embarrassing. But these are the truths that God speaks about and that Christ taught about. Frankly, we are embarrassed by God.

Isaiah would understand. Isaiah was an embarrassment. He was a prophet, who delivered God's Word to his people. The people did not want to hear about their real problem. They wanted prophets who would tell them that they were fine, and that everything was going to be okay. Isaiah was often the "bad" guy because he told them the truth. He was not popular and lived with a great deal of personal rejection. Yet, he knew what was going to happen. He knew that one day, all of the promises and pleasantries, and the smooth words of the popular prophets, would be revealed as lies. He knew that one day the Babylonians would conquer. Jerusalem would indeed fall. The unthinkable would happen and the nation of Judah would no longer be a nation. For 39 chapters, Isaiah exposed the problem. These were hard chapters to read and difficult sermons to preach and difficult sermons to listen to. Preaching through Isaiah has made it tempting for some to find more pleasant places. But, if you can trust someone to tell you the truth about your problem, then you can trust that person to tell you the truth about the solution. God is truth. God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. He tells you the truth about the seriousness of your need so that you can understand the glorious nature of his grace. That is why this second section of Isaiah is such true comfort. When God promises comfort and promises that this comfort will come through the Suffering Servant that he sends, we can believe it! We can believe it because everything else he said has come true, so we can believe him regarding this.

The nation of Judah turned her back on God, Isaiah and all of the prophets who warned her of the coming judgment. She turned to false prophets who told her what she wanted to hear and turned to idols that gave her an excuse to pursue immoral lives. But, then, just like God warned, the bottom dropped out. Judah was devastated by the Babylonians and literally taken from her land and taken into captivity in Babylon. In his extended song of mourning, known as Lamentations, Jeremiah speaks in detail about the atrocities of all of this. Starvation during the siege of Jerusalem led to cannibalism. The city was burned, the men were tortured, the girls were raped, and the boys were put to work as slaves. Isaiah knew this day was coming. He did not live to see it, like Jeremiah did, but he knew it was coming. He warned about it, but his warnings were ignored. It was easy to ignore them because he was such a minority. There were so many false prophets and lying priests who kept promising good things. It was easy and certainly convenient to believe them. But what do you believe when you discover that you have been lied to? The people who were supposed to speak for God and tell you the truth were more concerned that you liked them. They were more concerned about what you thought about them, than they were to really care for your soul and tell you the truth. So, now what? Are you going to trust anyone? The God, they told you about, did not protect you like the false prophets said. So, can you trust God? The answer is yes, but you have to trust God as He is, not the "god" that people make him to be. Again, Isaiah is back to this familiar theme of trusting God. Beginning in chapter 40, Isaiah's message takes on a new tone. Instead of warning about the coming judgment, he starts preaching a message of comfort. He anticipates the day when the judgment would come and now he is saying that the judgment of God will not be forever, because God is a God of mercy. He will not forget his covenant and his promise. Trust in the true God. There is no god like our God. And now, he sets forth these arguments to prove it, with the goal of asking, why would you look to any other?

There's no god like our God...

1. **...who has planned and accomplished our salvation.** (42.1-9)

Now follow the argument here. What is Judah's problem? Is it the Assyrians and Babylonians? No! The problem is their own sin; hence they have a problem with God. The Assyrians and Babylonians are simply tools in the hands of God. Judah wants to be rescued. She wants to be rescued from the Babylonians, but in reality she needs to be rescued from herself. She needs to be rescued from her sin. Ultimately, she needs to be rescued from the judgment of God who is using the Babylonians to judge her for her sin. Judah needs to be rescued from God. Herein lies the seemingly infinite problem. Judah is incapable of being faithful to God. She keeps returning to idols. She keeps adding to her own condemnation. She needs a savior from outside of her to rescue her from God. Here, 700 years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah promises that God is going to send a deliverer. This is all written down in order that the people then could see that there is no god like our God.

Now, if I was preaching from this text 200 years after Isaiah wrote it, I would be preaching to the Jews who had returned to the land of Judah. I would be pointing out the fact that once again God kept his word and that God would keep his word to send a Messiah, who is, in this text called, "the Servant." So, I would be saying that there is no god like our God who has planned our salvation. But, I am not preaching this 500 BC. I am preaching this AD 2012. This is why I say to you, that there is no god like our God who has not only planned, but has accomplished our salvation. God did send his Servant, just like he promised, and this same Jesus is coming back, just like he promised. These promises, which proved true, are further evidence that there's no god like our God.

- A. God has provided a Savior from outside of us. (1) (Matthew – next)
  - a. A Savior who infinitely delights God (the Father)
  - b. A Savior who is perfectly dependent on the Spirit.
  
- B. God has provided a Savior who is not like our saviors. (2-4)

Mitt Romney and Barak Obama are in campaign mode. Every slot on their calendar is driven by getting maximum positive exposure to the maximum number of voters, whose minds are not yet made up. Can you imagine Mitt Romney spending an afternoon in the UP sitting on the back porch with some no-name person whittling a piece of wood for a day or two? His handlers would be apoplectic! But, that is what Christ did, over and over. When the crowds became too large, when the people were ready to make him ruler by force, when the Pharisees were ready to collide, he would simply slip away. In Matthew 12 we read that he withdrew himself from the public, only to have some of them follow him, whom he healed. However, he "ordered them not to make him known." Why, because, as Matthew says, he was fulfilling this text in Isaiah. He is not like rulers, saviors, leaders like we are used to. He is not driven by public opinion or image perception. He does not need to project himself as a leader through carefully planned speeches or displays of power. The fact is, he is gentle. He looks like a pushover. But, as we see, underneath the skin of this Lamb, is a Lion.

Judah has been destroyed by her sinful kings, betrayed by her false prophets and manipulating priests and now turned over to the cruel desires of slave owners, task masters and rulers of another empire. The promises of her rulers proved hollow and vain. But God is not done with her. He is sending His Servant, a Savior who is not like our saviors. In fact, this Savior, is for the world.

C. God has provided a Savior for the world. (4)

God gives Isaiah a peak at what is happening. God is not simply going to deliver Judah from Babylon; God is going to do something much greater. God is going to send a savior who cannot be stopped. He is going to provide salvation for people from all over the world. The redemption of Judah from Babylon is only an illustration of what God is going to do for the world.

D. God has secured what he has promised. (5-7)

E. God has done it for the sake of his glory. (8)

F. God has guaranteed it before it happens. (9)

Look at the next three verses (10-12). How are we to respond to this? How is the entire earth to respond to this news? The whole earth is to sing to the LORD a new song. Why? Because one day, the entire earth is going to be set free from its bondage to decay. I know that most people do not realize this, but we should. God established the human race to be his representatives over this world. When we, (in Adam) sinned, we brought judgment not only upon ourselves, but upon the earth over which we rule. The earth is cursed through us. Do you realize that every time we sin, our sin not only affects us, it affects the entire created order. Our sin adds to the corruption, to the decay, to the groaning, and to the chaos of this earth. Natural disasters are the groanings of this earth that is rebelling against its sinful rulers. But, there is good news for this earth, just as there is good news for us. God is sending a second Adam, which he did in Christ, who did what the first Adam, and what we could not do. This second Adam, this Servant, this Messiah, will rule the world with truth and grace. One day, no more let sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground because he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found. That is why the desert and the cities, the villages and the coastlands can shout and sing from the top of the mountains. Singing is not optional for the true believer. Singing the praises of God is our way of identifying with the redeemed. We do not have to have a choir, an orchestra, soloists or special music of any kind. We HAVE to have congregational singing. In our singing, we are joining with God who sings over us. We join with the saints and sing to each other. We join as one body and sing to the Lord. And here, we see that we join with all creation and sing to the Creator.

There is no god like our God...

2. ...who is "all in." (42.13-17)

In these verses there are two examples that Isaiah uses. One is of a mighty warrior and the other is of a woman who is in labor. What do they have in common? Well, I can give testimony that it is dangerous to get in the way of a woman who is in labor, but I don't think that is the point here. In fact, look at v.14. God is saying that I have waited and waited and waited and now, finally it is time and I am acting. The example of a soldier is very fitting. You go through months and

months of training, until finally you are deployed. Then you are assigned to a mission, and on the eve of the operation, as you wait for the signal to go, you are waiting, building in intensity, rearing to go, all keyed up and just wanting to make it happen. Like a woman who for nine months has been waiting, carrying this child, anticipating the time for delivery, wanting the birth to take place, whose longings for this birth have been building, the woman now cries out in labor and delivery. The anticipated time has come! The warrior too, after waiting and waiting for the battle is given the word to attack, and he cries out as he finally is doing what he has prepared to do. Think of this. What is the accusation that Isaiah anticipates will be made against God? “God, you don’t care about me.” “God, you are not doing anything to rescue me.” What is the reality? God is not only waiting to act at the right time, but He waits intensely for the right time. All along God has been fully engaged in all that is going on. What you may think is apathy on the part of God is in reality building in him. He knows it all and it all affects him deeply.

Do not misinterpret God’s “inactivity” (as far as you are concerned). Even though you may not see God acting publicly, on your behalf right now God is not passive, ignorant, uncaring or distracted. God is fully engaged with what is going on. He is going to respond. But, even as he waits on the time that he has already determined to respond, God is not waiting dispassionately. God’s soul is in this. His waiting, like soldier on the eve of battle, like a woman waiting to deliver is building in intensity and will bring out his cry!

When God moves, his engagement is both judgment and mercy. It is judgment upon those who rebel against him (15) and mercy upon his own (16). In that day, those who have put their hope in idols will be utterly put to shame. They will be exposed for what they are. And they will have nothing. There’s no god like our God...

### 3. ...who understands the utter depth of our need. (42.18-25)

Here God is saying that his servant is blind, deaf, spiritually dull and impotent. This is not like the servant he describes at the beginning of the chapter, and with good reason. Here, God is describing the children of Israel (v.24). They were chosen by God to be his servant nation to the world, but the servant rebelled against her King and these verses make it very clear that this rebellion is serious. How can this nation be his servant-nation to put his glory on display to the world when they are plundered, looted and in prison? How can they reach others with the message of God, when they have not even believed the message that has been given to them? How can they rescue others when they need to be rescued? What did they do? They took the words of God and decided that they were too harsh, too demanding, too confining, and certainly not agreeable to their world. That which destroyed the nation of Judah is being repeated in churches all over. God’s word is unsophisticated, unrefined, uneducated, uncouth and patently unpopular. I fully expect the day to come shortly, when due to our willingness to stand upon God’s word as He defines issues like homosexuality, and gender related matters that your membership in this church will cost some of you your jobs. You see, sin no longer causes society to blush, God does. But, what happens when the church echoes the culture and tries to rid itself of issues like sin? What is there left to say?

A few years ago, NBC had a show called ER. A scene from that show makes this point very clear. A retired police officer is in the hospital. He is dying from cancer and he confesses to a

chaplain his guilt over allowing an innocent man to be framed and executed. He asks the chaplain, "How can I even hope for forgiveness?" and the chaplain replies, "I think sometimes it's easier to feel guilty than feel forgiven." "Which means what?" "That maybe your guilt over his death has become your reason for living. Maybe you need a new reason to go on." "I don't want to 'go on,'" says the dying man. "Can't you see that I'm dying?" The only thing that is holding me back is that I'm afraid-I'm afraid of what comes next." "What do you think that is?" the chaplain gently inquires. "You tell me. Is atonement possible? What does God want from me?" (chaplain) "I think it's up to each of one of us to interpret for ourselves what God wants." The man stares at her in bewilderment. "So people can do anything? They can rape, they can murder, and they can steal – all in the name of God and its OK?" (getting more intense) "No, that's not what I'm saying," the chaplain responds. "Then what are you saying? Because all I'm hearing is some New Age, God-is-love, have it your way \_\_\_\_!...No, I don't have time for this now." "You don't understand," the chaplain counters. "No, you don't understand!...I want a real chaplain who believes in a real God and a real hell!" "I hear that you are frustrated, but you need to ask yourself-" "No," the man interrupts, "I don't need to ask myself anything, I need answers and all of your questions and all your uncertainty are only making things worse." "I know you're upset," she blindly begins again which only causes him to explode. "God, I need someone who will look me in the eye and tell me how to find forgiveness, because I am running out of time!"

Not everyone will listen, but some will. And when they do, we have to be ready to look them in the eye, love them more than you love yourself, be honest about their sin, and then be honest about our Savior. God is righteous and just and he judges sin, but he loves to be merciful and so, he sent his Son, the Servant, to take our judgment for us. Believe it for yourself. It is true. Tell others, the gospel will never let them down.