



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Why Can't We Extend the Season?

Isaiah 42.1-9

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Introduction

1. It was not one of Elvis's biggest hits, but as stations trying to play everything from the 60s and/or everything about Christmas (as the XM radio stations were doing), it's no surprise it would get some air play in December. Written by Red West, the song's entitled, "If Every Day Was Like Christmas." It speaks of the bells, the cheer, the choirs, the peace, and the smiles of the children. The chorus repeats the wish for every day to be like Christmas and the good feelings going on continuously. If it did, the world would be wonderful!¹
2. It's a common sentiment, one we hear expressed every year. We may never see it completely realized in this world. I'm one who believes we can see more of it if we understand what it means and what must happen for it to occur.
3. As the church, we need to know:
 - a. That the things wished for by those who want every day to be just like Christmas are in fact the things that Christ want us to learn and be. These are not the things we learn from him as a cuddly baby, but the ideals he taught and died for.
 - b. That we who constitute the church, Christ's body, are the only ones who have been charged with the task to do what is needed to extend the season.
4. We'll use Isaiah's servant songs as the beginning place for exploring these things.

Body

- I. Jesus the Servant.
 - A. In Isaiah, there are four passages called "the Servant Songs" (42.1-9; 49.1-7; 50.4-11; 52.13-53.12).
 1. There is debate about the identity of the servant. At times, the servant is Israel (see 41.8; 49.3); at other times, the servant seems to be looking at or trying to help Israel (see 49.5-6).
 2. To understand Isaiah's message to his original readers, we have to work through the identity of this figure in each text.

¹ Red West, "If Every Day Was Like Christmas," <https://lyrics.elvispresley.com.au/if-every-day-was-like-christmas.html>. Accessed October 31, 2018.

- B. The New Testament shows that the ultimate filling up of the servant figure is found in the ministry of Jesus.
 - 1. There are too many passages and they are too complex to examine here, but we can see the point from one that is part of Luke's birth narrative (Luke 2.32).
 - 2. Simeon's language is quoted from Isaiah 49.6 (which has the same phrasing as 42.6). It ties Jesus' purpose to the mission statement and emphasis on the messianic age found in Isaiah 40-66 (for a fuller statement, see Isa 61.1-2 [LXX] = Luke 4.18-19).
 - 3. The use of these twin Isaiah references is not limited to Jesus' birth story; they are also used prominently to describe the ongoing mission to be carried out by his body (cf. Acts 13.47; 26.15-19, 22-23).
- C. The fact that Paul applied the same passages to the church that Luke applied to Jesus shows that the servant's mission in Isaiah is also our mission (and the key to extending the "spirit of Christmas"). That needs more examination.

II. Jesus' Mission as Servant.

- A. The application of the servant songs to Jesus shows that his mission was not about being a cuddly (non-threatening) little baby.
- B. The application of Isaiah 53 to Jesus shows one aspect of this (cf. Acts 8.32-33; Matt 20.28).²
- C. But the work of Jesus as he lived is also part of the picture, as Matthew 12 shows.
 - 1. Matthew 12.18-21 quotes Isaiah 42.1-4.³
 - 2. Matthew quotes Isaiah 42 in response to the Pharisees' criticisms of Jesus (vv 14-17).
 - 3. They criticized him because of two prior events in Matthew 12.
 - a) He had allowed his disciples to pluck the grain on the Sabbath (vv 1-8).
 - b) Perhaps of greater concern, he had healed a man on the Sabbath (vv 9-13).
 - 4. In applying Isaiah 42 to these events, Matthew pointed to the larger mission of the servant that Jesus is perfectly embodied: to bring restorative justice to the world (see all of Isaiah 42.1-9, but especially vv 1, 3, 4 where the word "justice" appears).

III. How to Extend the Season: Show Justice.

- A. Matthew 12.1-13 is a "slice of life" in the ministry of Jesus, a typical example of what he consistently did (cf. Acts 10.34-35).
- B. When we look closer at Isaiah 42.1-9, we get a sense of his mission and what our mission should be.
 - 1. The Hebrew understanding of justice involved more than simply rewarding good and punishing wrong.
 - 2. In contrast to this reactive form of justice, God's justice is proactive, "a saving, healing, restorative justice" as God puts things right that had gone wrong.⁴

² For a discussion of the latter text, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 13 through 28*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (paperback edition), 433-434.

³ Part of Matthew's citation is closer to the Hebrew text than the LXX, while other parts are closer to the latter. His use of only the last of three lines in Isaiah's verse 4 serves to highlight the extension of Messiah's mission to the Gentiles.

⁴ N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, 64, 71.

3. It included ... "the reordering of social life and social power so that the weak (widows and orphans) may live a life of dignity, security, and well-being."⁵
- C. What does this mean as we think about how nice it would be to extend the season?
 1. It means that we must be serious about seeing God's will for justice applied to the world.
 2. It means that we must stop wishful thinking and start acting.
 3. It means that we must take seriously what we have long said: Christ is about more than "Christmas."
 4. Specifically, it might mean that we find creative, proactive ways to reach out to and help the weak, poor, racially /economically outcasts of our community in the interest of showing the healing, restoring nature of Jesus (in ways that give the glory to Christ and his body, not some other agency). Possibilities for such outreach are all around us.
 5. I'll mention just two examples; you can brainstorm (or take initiative) for others. What if we were to:
 - a) Buy gifts for the children's home[s] at times other than December; wonder if they need school supplies?
 - b) Approach our local schools to see what they might need in the way of helping some of their children (we might be surprised, even in the suburbs)?⁶

Conclusion

1. Why can't we extend the season? We can, if we take seriously the charge of Isaiah 42.5-7 – ⁵ "Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ 'I am the LORD; *I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,* ⁷ *to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.*'"

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⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion, 42.

⁶ I am not suggesting that we stop taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves during the Christmas season; those opportunities will continue to exist. But, our response to them is reactive, not proactive.