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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
Pastor David Pfeiffer

## **Rescued Out of a Hopeless Situation**

Isaiah 42:14-21

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Grace and peace to you, in Jesus name, who is the Light of the world, who reveals the works of God in each of us, dear fellow redeemed,

We turn today to the Old Testament to consider the words of Isaiah the prophet. As we pick up with these selected verses from chapter 42, we remember, as always with Scripture, that we are in the midst of a larger context. In virtually the same breath, the Lord enacting both judgment and deliverance. Impending doom cannot be avoided due to the hardness of the people's heart. An invading army from the west will leave the great city of Jerusalem in rubble and take the people under their rule. God addresses both a rebellious people, deaf to Isaiah's word. He must make alert them to their hopeless situation before comfort can be spoken.

At the same time, there is hope. Righteousness breaks forth and hope is on the horizon. The chosen Servant of the Lord is raised up in a promise of righteousness. In His grace, God will visit His people with comfort through the Messiah, Jesus. He will proclaim the gospel of forgiveness to the ends of the earth. There is comfort for those who will hear. In virtually the same loving breath, God is enacting both judgment and deliverance.

### ***Isaiah 42:14–21***

- <sup>14</sup> *"I have held My peace a long time,  
I have been still and restrained Myself.  
Now I will cry like a woman in labor,  
I will pant and gasp at once.*
- <sup>15</sup> *I will lay waste the mountains and hills,  
And dry up all their vegetation;  
I will make the rivers coastlands,  
And I will dry up the pools.*
- <sup>16</sup> *I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;  
I will lead them in paths they have not known.  
I will make darkness light before them,*

*And crooked places straight.  
 These things I will do for them,  
 And not forsake them.*

<sup>17</sup> *They shall be turned back,  
 They shall be greatly ashamed,  
 Who trust in carved images,  
 Who say to the molded images,  
 'You are our gods.'*

<sup>18</sup> *"Hear, you deaf;  
 And look, you blind, that you may see.*

<sup>19</sup> *Who is blind but My servant,  
 Or deaf as My messenger whom I send?  
 Who is blind as he who is perfect,  
 And blind as the Lord's servant?*

<sup>20</sup> *Seeing many things, but you do not observe;  
 Opening the ears, but he does not hear."*

<sup>21</sup> *The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake;  
 He will exalt the law and make it honorable.*

### **Rescued Out of a Hopeless Situation**

1. Blind and Helpless
2. Blind and Hopeless
3. Blind but Filled with Help and Hope

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

For Mike the problem was pride. I worked at an appliance store with Mike for three years while I was in college. In his younger years, Mike was the sort of guy who was the best at everything. And if he wasn't, he wouldn't let you know. The best golfer. The best pool player. The best mechanic. But as he got older, this would change. Mike discovered he had a degenerate eye disease. By the time I met him he was in his fifties and was legally blind. He could see a little; but only peripherally. He could see nothing that was directly in front of him. He could see just enough; just enough to get by delivering appliances. It was kind of amazing. Even while legally blind, he was still the best mechanical repair man I've ever met. But there was one thing about Mike. He didn't like to ask for help; and he especially didn't like to be told he was wrong. He was one of these people who was never wrong. No matter how much he might need it, no matter how you offer, he really didn't like to admit when he needed help.

But this wasn't just while working on appliances. It was in conversations about religion. When it came to sin or Christ, he refused to accept any help. He called Christianity a crutch. To him, it was just an excuse for people that can't handle their own problems. To Mike, Christianity was for the weak minded. And Mike had a brilliant mind. He was perhaps one of the smartest people I've ever met. Yet, when it came to the need for God's rescue, when it came to the helpless state of our sinful flesh, he was more blind than ever. For Mike the problem was pride – a refusal to admit the need for help.

This morning we consider three types of blind people. Firstly, the person who needs help but refuses to admit it – the blind and helpless (meaning, un-help-able); secondly, the person who needs help, recognizes it, but thinks there is no one who can help them out of the situation – the blind and hopeless; and finally, we will consider the person who needs help, who recognizes it, who sees no way out, but someone intervenes and reveals a way he never thought possible – a rescue has been enacted and now this person, once helpless, once hopeless, suddenly is filled with help and hope. This morning we consider how it is that the Lord rescues us out of a hopeless situation.

### **1. Blind and Helpless**

Israel was a nation in need of help. They are surrounded by forces much stronger than they. They are soon to be surrounded by the Babylonian hordes, the great empire of Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians had already taken the Assyrian armies to the north, and now God was turns them upon His own people.

Yet there are even more pressing forces at work. There is a spiritual distress, a sickness that invades the nation. The Lord is calling, calling, waiting, waiting; all the while Isaiah is preaching, preaching. But there is no response. So Isaiah begins his prophecy with these words of the LORD: *Isaiah 1:5 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints.* Israel was a nation in need of rescue.

When His people are in distress, the Lord is in distress. He is not a god afar off; He is not made of stone. He is ever present with His people, in their distress; in striking them, He is stricken. He is a jealous God – meaning, this is His people, redeemed, called to be His own in His covenant of peace; but they are deaf to His words and they are blind to His love.

*v.14–15 “I have held My peace a long time, I have been still and restrained Myself. Now I will cry like a woman in labor, I will pant and gasp at once. I will lay waste the mountains and hills, And dry up all their vegetation; I will make the rivers coastlands, And I will dry up the pools.*

He is like a woman in the heat of labor. He cannot wait for this people; He must take action. The LORD cries out. In His distress, He takes action. What will it take? 70 years in exile? A city in ruins? A glorious temple turned to ashes? A visit from God’s own Son? “Hear you deaf; and look you blind that you may see” (v.18)

Sadly, many will not hear; many will not see. The rescue happens right in front of their eyes and they are blind to it. The LORD rescues His people from Babylon, brings them back to the land of promise, and raises up His faithful Servant right in their midst. The Messiah comes as promised and the wonders of God’s power are performed right in front of their eyes. A man born blind from birth can now see. But will they see?

They say in John 9, “This Man is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath.” (John 9:16) They are only seeing on the periphrial. They are so caught up on earning God’s favor through their own works that they cannot see the divine favor is right before their eyes. Even the blind man could see it. He says to them, “I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? ... Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes!” (John 9:27,30). The Pharisees are the ones who are really blind.

*v.18–19 “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 he who is perfect, And blind as the Lord’s servant?*

Do you know anyone who needs help but refuses to admit it? Someone who is helpless because he refuses to accept help?

Mike is not the only one in need of help. There is a blindness that occurs in our lives too. Maybe we are afraid of crutches just like Mike. We are afraid of asking for help or offering help. We are afraid of what this might mean. What will it uncover? What sort of guilt or pain or anger will be uncovered? What will it take away from me? We want to be in control.

And so we shut our eyes to it. We only look at life on the peripheral – we see what others are doing wrong, and miss the gracious favor of God that is at work right in front of us.

God is in distress and can remain silent no longer; He cries out, that we might hear Him and turn toward His marvelous work.

## **2. Blind and Hopeless**

The next four hundred years would be a time of darkness for Israel. The Babylonians will only be the beginning of the judgment. This is the beginning of a judgment that will continue for generations; generations of Jews will be held in subjection to pagan rulers. Empire upon empire will take turns in ruling over them. Prophets cease to speak. The word of the Lord becomes scarce. And where is there promised King?

Many would grow hopeless. They know they are in need of rescue, but they see no way out. Another type of person is the blind and hopeless – they recognize the need for help, but they see no way out of a difficult situation.

What is more hopeless than being blind from birth? The man was born blind. No hope to ever see the starry sky – a sign of Abraham's promise; no hope to ever watch a sunset illumine the glorious Temple of Jerusalem; no hope to ever look upon the faces of those you love. Nothing but darkness.

Who do you know that feels stuck with no way out? Maybe its you. It's addiction, it's anxiety, it's depression; it's fear, it's anger, it's bitterness; it's financial problems, it's family problems; it's marriage problems. There are these problems that you think you can never be rid of; there are these character traits you think you will never get over; there is a past that will never go away. There are these sins you think you can never be forgiven for; there are these sins you think you can never forgive someone else for. It's hopeless.

This is the type of person who knows he needs help, but sees no way out. The faithful in Israel could easily have grown hopeless. There seemed to be no way out. They see only the peripheral and are blind to what is happening right in front of them. But all the while God was enacting a great thing right in front of them. And in time, He would reveal it. He would open the eyes of the blind and rescues His people out of a hopeless situation.

## **3. Blind but Filled with Help and Hope**

Israel would never be without help or hope. Isaiah's prophecy is filled with it: words of rescue. God would remain faithful to His Word. For His righteousness sake, He will

rescue His people. Right in the midst of a helpless, hopeless judgment would come One to rescue; One who would fill them with help and hope.

*v.16 I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them.*

When it seems there is no way out is when the Lord takes the lead. They remained blind to this way, because the way out cannot be seen – only believed. Those helpless and hopeless receive this prophecy of Isaiah – a Word filled with God’s distress, filled with God’s righteousness, filled with God’s promise.

It is an unexpected rescue as the LORD takes things into His own hands. “Behold, My Servant, My Chosen One, in whom My soul delights,” says the LORD. He releases helpless Israel from their obligation and sends His King as Servant in their place – the faithful for the unfaithful. In His unexpected way, this King appears as Servant to the world – His own Son will enter into the LORD’s judgment with help and hope for all. It is so wonderful and unexpected in fact, that it cannot be seen, but only believed.

So Isaiah writes, “He has no beauty or appearance that we should value him highly.” In the darkness, in humble form, a Man despised and rejected; a Man of God’s righteousness considered as a sinner; stricken by God and of no value. A Man crucified. Rather than coming with the glory of kings, conquering the Babylonians with might and riches; Jesus is bruised, defeated, subject to Roman and Jewish powers. The King comes as Suffering Servant. It is a way they did not know and paths they never expected.

In the midst of judgment, comes rescue. God cries out and His Son is crucified for our sins. In the heat of labor, God can restrain Himself no longer; He cries out and enacts His love in the most painful of ways. He enters His own judgment that He might rescue us out of a hopeless situation. And in labor, He gives birth to something glorious; from the dark hopelessness of the grave a light shines forth and our Savior rises to eternal life. He gives birth to something glorious: a help to the helpless and a hope to the hopeless – an end to the pain, an end to the conflict, an end to our sins. He shows us a way that we never imagined: a peace that knows no end, forgiveness that will not be reversed, and a hope that is yours.

When it seems there is no way out a blind man receives sight. “Neither this man’s sinned, nor His parents.” It is the unexpected way of the LORD: A man born blind can

see. This helpless and hopeless situation was given him that the work of God might be revealed. That is to say, when we think it hopeless, when there is no way out, is when the LORD takes the lead. The work of God is to fill the helpless with help and the hopeless with hope. It was a glimpse of His resurrection, a light in this dark world, a promise of something greater to come for Israel, for the blind man, and for you.

It is true that none of us can see a way out of sin and guilt; addiction, anxiety, depression; fear, anger, bitterness; financial problems, family problems; marriage problems, and so on. Not by any earthly way, nor by any strength of our own. It is only when we realize how helpless we are that God helps us; and it is only when we realize how hopeless we are, that God gives us hope.

It is not that God rids us of our problems; but He leads us through them, in paths we never expected. His Word opens our eyes, so that we no longer see only the peripheral, but all of a sudden we see what lays before us; and what is standing right in front of us is Christ, the King who lives to serve; who turns us toward the future, who removes sins that darken our past, who strengthens us in times of pain and anger. For His righteousness sake, He rescues us.

And He send us forth on a rescue mission to the world. As light in darkness, we are the work of God's glory – just like that blind man. As Christians we are the Lord's rescue to those in need: to the helpless, to the hopeless, we come filled with help and hope.

*Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.*

One thing I wished I had said to Mike was, "Yes, it is a crutch." It is a wheelchair, in fact. Our faith begins in helplessness and hopelessness; we know we need help, we see no way out, and suddenly Someone intervenes and rescues us in a way we never thought possible.

And He says, "These things I will do for them, and not forsake them." Amen.