

Isaiah 42:14-21

Theme: Lord, lead me

Running at full speed through a totally dark and overgrown forest because you are trying to escape danger would be terrifying. Put yourself in that mental space. Something terrible is behind you. Unfamiliar and threatening sounds pop up here and there, some much too close for comfort. You know that the best shot at safety is going forward, so you just go but you don't have a clue if it's the right way – and you have to keep running because of the danger behind you! Navigating the darkness while running is truly dangerous. Put yourself in that situation! Lost. Scared. Vulnerable. Alone. Now, imagine that, in the darkness, you're touched, not with anything sharp or terrible, but by a hand gentle yet strong. Can you imagine the relief? Even though danger is all around, the relief of being found by someone who knows the way, who can guide you, is huge! You'd squeeze back as tightly as you could never wanting to let go, never be separated.

That's the picture Isaiah gives us in ch. 42. At the start of the chapter, the prophet describes God's servant. He brings God delight. He brings justice to the nations. He gently draws people in with grace and saves them even when the pulse of faith is barely detectable. The Servant takes people by the hand to bring them into a covenant relationship with God. God does this in his time.

When that time comes, the Savior arrives with power. Isaiah wrote , *“I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.”* **(Isaiah 42:15)** The one who can stand up next to a mountain and chop it down with the edge of his hand, in that very same instant, extends the other to the weak and helpless. What a contrast! The Almighty Servant who commands creation stoops down to help and lead those who cannot see. He says, *“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.”* **(Isaiah 42:16)** That's us! We're being led. We can't see our way through the darkness of sin ruined life with suffering, alluring temptations, and death, but Jesus can. Darkness isn't darkness to him. He knows and see everything, all paths, every danger and obstacle, every twist. So he takes our hand and leads us carefully and patiently. Think of a guide runner helping a VI (Visually Impaired) runner. Clear instructions as they move forward: “Dirt trail to gravel in 3, 2, 1...5 steps up and right turn in 3, 2, 1...” Every word brings reassurance and confidence, every word is needed.

It's real relief to have someone who always knows the way, someone who never gets lost. With Jesus, we walk forward in peace, on level, smooth ground because he leads. Isaiah dials it up, though, saying the Servant turns darkness into light. God in Christ both is the light and gives us sight to see it.

The dark threatening forest escape is much less menacing when it's a bright, sunshiny day and the almighty Servant of the Lord, Jesus, is by your side. Oh, that changes everything. You're still in the forest. The forest is life itself. It's full of dangers and confusion. It's easy to get lost. But with Jesus being and illuminating the path, you see, are found, are rescued, are led safely to heaven. When the Son's with you, the Father is also and the Spirit makes you his temple. Jesus promised to be with us always. He'll do this. He'll never forsake us. You're never alone.

The blessings of sight and light and relief are ours to enjoy now and then most fully in heaven. Only Jesus gives these blessings, so don't expect other things to or act like they do. To do that, and we all do that, is idolatry. Isaiah says those who trust in those things to be lead through this life are turned back in utter shame. Pray for God to keep your focus on Christ who was crucified and forsaken, who died and who lives again. He's our safety. He's our relief.

But then, Isaiah turns to the very people he just comforted and says sharply to the very people God held by the hand to lead and gave sight to see, *“Hear, you deaf; look you blind and see!” (Isaiah 42:18)*. Why? Because we’ve a penchant for closing our eyes to God’s goodness and just taking off full tilt into the woods again! Listen to God through Isaiah to not do that! Keep your eyes on Jesus, the servant of the Lord himself described in v. 19 as blind and a messenger who is deaf. Jesus would be so completely dedicated to the Father’s will of redeeming sinners that this is all he’d see. He’d only say the Father’s words, not his own – ever! Because of that, you are saved. Keep listening to his Word and keep being led by him through his life to heaven. Let’s not let this be entirely true of us, *“You have seen many things, but you pay no attention, your ears are open, but you do not listen.” (Isaiah 42:20)* Let’s repent of the times and ways that it is! We hide and try to conceal some sin from God’s light and sight, or we try to choose to not show someone else the mercy God has shown us freely in sudden selective deafness. God forgives me and you of this. I’m glad for that. Phew. We’re forgiven. Jesus and his love are ours and our eyes have been opened to see that. We’re glad for that, too, because it means we see things as they are now, see the way to heaven, and even see a glimpse of the life at the end of this one.

Picture again the now illuminated forest, the world well-defined for us by the light of Jesus, his Word which is glorious and shines, and his saving love. What do you see? Some others walking confidently because they have light to see, too, but many who are wandering. Many running in panic, in terror, because they can’t see. When you see them, what goes through your mind? *“That person’s gonna get hurt! Those poor, lost people! They need help.”* Thoughts of sympathy. Sure. So do these types of thoughts: *“That guy who’s about to get hurt looks like a jerk from here anyway. It’d be a ton of work to go and help them and give them relief even though I’m grateful for that. I’m sure someone else help.”* Yeah, we think that kinda stuff too.

What goes through God’s? Compassion. Jesus once looked at the crowds and had compassion on because they were as sheep without a shepherd, so he became theirs. The blind and lost, he finds and saves. So the prayer, the plea, *“Lord, lead me,”* isn’t only about me/us. It’s about them. *“Lord, lead me to them. They’re running in the dark. They’re scared. They think they know where they’re going, but they’re running in circles and getting hurt. If I’m the light you say I am, and I believe that I am, lead me to them. Give me a chance to fulfill my purpose as a light.”* When you desperately needed it, someone once took your hand and said, *“I’m here! It’s ok. I’m with ya, buddy. It’ll be alright.”* The Servant of the Lord did. He has also sent people into your dark moments to bring much needed light. How awesome. Thank Jesus for that. Now do the same. Hold someone’s hand even if it’s dirty and scraped up and bloodied. Hold on, don’t let go. Lead them to Jesus, the one who leads to heaven. Amen.