

**Sermon**  
**February 9, 2020**

**Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Zeta T. Lamberson**

**The Servant's Challenge: To Be Obedient**  
**Isaiah 50:4-9**

Today we come to the third Servant Song found in Isaiah. Scholars differ in their opinion on the identity of the servant. When Isaiah first spoke these words in the context of the Babylonian exile the servant was most likely the covenant community of Israel. As the disciples poured through the words of the prophets following Christ's resurrection they came to believe the Servant was the long anticipated Messiah - Jesus. But as with most prophecies the truth of their message rings true through the ages. And so as we read these words today we hear the challenge anew as God's servants in the twenty first century. In the first two Servant songs we heard the Servant's challenge to bring justice to all and to be a light to the nations. Today in the third Servant song we hear the challenge to be obedient.

Today is Scout Sunday. Scouting has been an important part of our ministry at Covenant for over 50 years. What a joy it is to not only support Troop 750. But to also see the amazing growth of our Cub Pack. Scouts know about obedience. The word obey is found in both the Scout promise or oath and in the Scout Law. I am sure the Scouts here today can say the Scout promise with me:

On my honor, I will do my best

To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law;

To help other people at all times;

To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

Thank you!

To do my duty - a duty is a responsibility. And here in the Scout promise we find that the first responsibility a scout has is to God. That is why this is an important program for the church to sponsor.

In the Scout Law the word obedient is found in the very center of the twelve words that describe a Scout. Will you say the Boy Scout Law with me:

A Scout is: Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean and Reverent.

So the words of this passage of Scripture are especially relevant as you gather to worship with us today. For these words remind us what it takes to be obedient to God. An important reminder not only to Scouts but also to all who believe and worship God.

The first thing the Servant needs to do to be obedient is to listen. We live in a culture where people are not listening to one another. I read this week a powerful letter a boy with a record of juvenile delinquency wrote to his parents. It is convicting.

Dear Folks,

You asked me why I did those things and why I gave you so much trouble, and the answer is easy for me to give you, but I wonder if you will understand.

Remember when I was about six or seven and I used to want you to just listen to me? I remember all the nice things you gave me for Christmas and my birthday. I was really happy with the things -- for about a week -- at the time I got those things, but the rest of the time during the year I really didn't want presents. I just wanted for you to listen to me like I was a somebody who felt things, too, because even when I was young I felt things. But you said you were busy.

Mom, you are a wonderful cook, and you had everything so clean and you were tired so much from doing all those things that made you so busy, but, you know something, Mom? I would have liked crackers and peanut butter just as well if you had only sat down with me a while during the day and said to me: "Tell me all about it so I can maybe help you understand."

If Donna ever has children, I hope you will tell her to just pay some attention to the one who doesn't smile very much because that one will really be crying inside. And when she's about to bake six dozen cookies, tell her to make sure first that the kids don't want to tell her about a dream or a hope or something. Thoughts are important to small kids, even though they don't have so many words to use when they tell about what they have inside them.

I think that all the kids who are doing so many things that grown-ups are tearing out their hair worrying about are really looking for somebody who really and truly will treat them as they would a grown-up who might be useful to them, you know -- polite-like. If you folks had ever said to me: "Pardon me" when you interrupted me, I'd have dropped dead!

Your son (<https://sermons.com/sermon/the-passion-of-the-servant-leader/1360865>)

Friends, we are called to listen to one another. Our tendency is to think what we have to say is more important than what others are saying but the way we learn is by listening carefully to one another. It is also the way we show others that we care for them. And if we don't learn how to listen to one another then how do we expect to have the discipline to listen to God. For the Servant's challenge is not only to listen to others but to listen for God to speak. It is from the Word of God found in scripture that we learn what God desires for our lives. Isaiah said:

*Morning by morning he wakens -  
wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught..*

Eugene Petersen in the Message translates verses 4-5 this way:

*The Master, God, has given me a well-taught tongue,  
So I know how to encourage tired people.  
He wakes me up in the morning,  
Wakes me up, opens my ears,  
to listen as one ready to take orders.  
The Master, God, opened my ears,  
and I didn't go back to sleep,  
didn't pull the covers back over my head.  
I followed orders....*

As God's servants we are challenged to begin every day opening our ears to God's leading. We are challenged to take time to listen for God to speak to us as we begin our day and throughout our day. That is why a morning devotional, bible reading or time of prayer as we begin our day is important. It sets the tone for our day and alerts us to God's desires for our lives and reminds us that God's loving

hand is present with us and guiding us throughout the day.

One sure way we know we have heard God is when God's word moves us to action. Isaiah said "*I followed orders...*" And friends the second thing this Servant song tells us is that being obedient to God means that we must stand firm in our faith in the face of opposition. There will be suffering involved. The people of Israel knew about suffering. They were in exile. They had been forced to leave their homes and everything they knew and to live in a foreign land. My friends, being obedient to God's commands still today can lead to suffering. There are examples all around us. We have seen them play out in the media this very week.

The Servant was obedient and it led to three of the most humiliating forms of punishment in that day - punishments that reminds us of what Jesus and others who follow Jesus endured. The Servant gave his back for a beating knowing there was no hope of protecting himself. The Servant offered his cheeks allowing his beard, a badge of maturity and virility in that culture, to be plucked out one hair at a time. The Servant stood still like stone not turning his face when others spat on him. Friends, to be obedient to God means that we are to stand firm even in the face of opposition. We are called to make the hard choices because of our faith. We are called to be obedient to God even when those around us are scorning us and abusing us. Obedience to God is not easy. It is much easier to just go along with the crowd but our challenge as servants of God is to not turn backward but to stand firm and speak the truth in love. That is what being obedient to God demands.

We stand firm in the face of opposition confident that the Lord God helps us. Twice in these final verses Isaiah proclaims "*The Lord God helps us.*" As God's servants we are confident that God will be with us and will deliver us. This knowledge gives us the strength to stand firm and is the third thing our passage teaches us about obedience.

The Servant "*set his face like flint.*" Flint is a very hard type of rock that has been used since

the Stone Age to make weapons. To set his face like flint meant that nothing would stop him. In the New Testament we find this concept when Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem as he made his final journey into Jerusalem that led to his death on the cross.

The Servant's insistence that the Lord is near suggests that the Lord stands with the Servant as goel - a term meaning the "next-of-kin" - who would naturally stand at his side during any legal proceeding. And so when facing the opposition the Servant chooses obedience believing that as long as God is beside him his future is secure.

Friends, as we know only too well, that does not mean we will not suffer and in Jesus' case we know it led to his death on the cross. But it does mean that we live secure that God is always with us. For in life and in death we belong to God. And we are challenged to be obedient even in the face of suffering trusting that God is with us every step of the way. Friends, this is not just true of those who lived long ago. Today there are still people who are making the difficult decision to be obedient to God's call even in the face of death threats.

Gary W. Light, a pastor from Virginia, tells of his experience in Peru during a time of poverty, suffering, and terrorism. He worked in a church which sought to minister to a community struggling to form itself in the desert on the outskirts of the city of Trujillo. None of the members of the church had much money, but they did everything possible to minister to the physical as well as spiritual needs of the people in the community. The church began to help a family in which the father was disabled. His legs were run over by a bus while he was repairing an automobile. The church helped this family with food, hospital bills, and other expenses. The people offered the family friendship, prayer, and support through a long, painful ordeal. The family began attending church, and eventually the mother, father, and oldest daughter made professions of faith, accepting Jesus Christ as Lord.

Light baptized them. Then the mother disappeared for about a month. When she returned,

she stepped to the front of the congregation after the worship service in order to address her friends and neighbors. Her story was a complete surprise to Light and to many others. Luisa confessed that she had been a member of Sendero Luminoso, a terrorist movement. She was a terrorist! She then told what had happened to her because of her Christian commitment. When the other members of the terrorist cell discovered that Luisa had become a Christian, they were afraid that she might confess and turn in the other members of the cell. So they kidnaped her and took her to Lima. For about a month, she had been punished and forced to participate in terrorist activity so that she could not turn anyone in without incriminating herself. She managed to escape and came back to Trujillo. That Sunday morning, she confessed her past to the church and ended her speech with these words: "I will never go back! I don't care if they kill me; I will never go back. I am a Christian now!" She had made a choice, a bold choice to be obedient to God above all else. (Gary, W. Light, Interpretation Bible Studies: Isaiah, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 73)

Friends, we too are called to make that choice as God's servants. Will we be obedient to God - listening for God's word to lead and guide us standing firm against opposition trusting that God is present with us every step of the way?