

02/06/2022

## ISAIAH 42:2-3

### (THE SERVANT OF THE LORD – WHAT HE IS LIKE)

#### THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

##### INTRODUCTION

This morning we continue our consideration of Isaiah 42:2-3 and it's PROPHECY CONCERNING CHRIST as the SERVANT OF THE LORD. You will recall from both, the sermon last week, and the week before, that Isaiah 42:1-4 tells us THREE THINGS concerning Christ as the SERVANT OF THE LORD. FIRST, WHO HE IS as the SERVANT OF THE LORD. SECOND, WHAT HE IS LIKE as the SERVANT OF THE LORD. And THIRD, WHAT HAS HE COME TO DO as the SERVANT OF THE LORD. The first matter, WHO HE IS, verse 1 addresses. The second matter, WHAT HE IS LIKE, is the concern of verses 2 and 3. The third and final matter, WHAT HE HAS COME TO DO, verse 4 speaks to.

In our previous messages we have looked closely at the text of verses 1-4, it's language, meaning, and general message. As well, we have considered the THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE of verse 1 concerning WHO THE SERVANT OF THE LORD IS, and it's PERSONAL APPLICATION to us. At the end of last week's message, we began our consideration of the THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE, and it's PERSONAL APPLICATION to us, of verses 2-4, concerning WHAT THE SERVANT OF THE LORD IS LIKE.

The first matter we observed last week in relation to this, was how we as Christians, both before and after conversion, are like BRUISED REEDS.

This week, we observe how we as Christians at both, the beginning of the Christian life, and later in the Christian life, are like **"SMOKING FLAX."**

##### THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE AND APPLICATION OF THE TEXT - SECOND POINT: THE CHRISTIAN IS LIKE "THE SMOKING FLAX"

So, the SECOND THING we observe from our text concerning the children of God, the saints, is that they are like, **"SMOKING FLAX."** Remember, from last week, that **"THE SMOKING FLAX"** is a wick which is nearly extinguished. With it there is but little light, and that light is mixed with smoke. The Christian, the child of God, the believer, is at both, the beginning of the Christian life, and later in the Christian life, like **"SMOKING FLAX."**

The meaning of this is first, that GRACE is LITTLE at FIRST, at the BEGINNING of the CHRISTIAN LIFE, and second, that LATER in the CHRISTIAN LIFE it is always MIXED/MINGLED WITH CORRUPTION.

In respect to saying that GRACE is LITTLE at FIRST, Scripture teaches that there are stages in the Christian life. The apostle John in I John 2:12-14 speaks of “LITTLE CHILDREN,” “FATHERS,” and “YOUNG MEN,” The author of Hebrews in chapter 5:11-14 speaks of those who have need of milk and are like a “BABE” in relation to the teaching of the Word of God whereas others are of “FULL AGE” and are able to digest the “STRONG MEAT” of the Word. All this language refers to different stages of spiritual growth and maturity. But in the SPIRITUAL LIFE ALL CHRISTIANS BEGIN AS BABES, and it is in this sense that GRACE IS LITTLE AT FIRST. But also, with the Christian, NOTHING IS MORE GLORIOUS AFTERWARD.

This morning, as we consider this, and ourselves in relation to it, let us remember that ‘things of greatest perfection are longest in coming to their growth.’ And that man, created in the very image of God, ‘comes to perfection little by little.’ And the NEW MAN IN CHRIST, who as man has the ‘most excellent frame,’ so much the more grows up by degrees. Thus, as we think about ourselves spiritually, let us not be discouraged by what we see as the ‘small beginnings of grace’ in us, BUT RATHER, let us think upon that which we are being brought to. May we never forget or lose sight of the END to which God has called us and for which He is preparing us. We have been CHOSEN TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST. WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN IN HIM TO BE PERFECTED IN HOLINESS AND ULTIMATELY TO BE WITHOUT BLAME BEFORE HIM IN LOVE. WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO HAVE OUR VILE BODIES FASHIONED LIKE UNTO HIS OWN GLORIOUS BODY. WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO REIGN WITH HIM. THIS IS OUR END. But this has a small beginning in all of us, and all of us are brought to this by degrees and in stages. So let us by no means despise the day of small things. One of the greatest of the Puritans, Richard Sibbes, wrote concerning this, “IT IS WITH THE CHRISTIAN AS IT WAS WITH CHRIST, WHO SPRANG OUT OF THE DEAD STOCK OF JESSE, OUT OF DAVID’S FAMILY, ISAIAH 13:2, WHEN IT WAS AT THE LOWEST, BUT HE GREW UP HIGHER THAN THE HEAVENS. IT IS NOT WITH THE TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AS IT WAS WITH THE TREES OF PARADISE, WHICH WERE CREATED ALL PERFECT AT THE FIRST.” Again, let us remember, we come to perfection little by little, and let us not be discouraged at the SMALL BEGINNINGS OF GRACE.

In respect to this I know there are some among us who often look at themselves and see in themselves LITTLE OF THE GRACE OF CHRIST. Indeed, so little, they often think themselves not to be a Christian at all. And there are others amongst us, who beginning to genuinely grow in grace and Christ, are overwhelmed by what they see to be their lack of past growth and knowledge in the things of God. They despair that they will ever know what they should and be who they are called to be in Him. BUT AGAIN, let us not discouraged at the SMALL BEGINNINGS OF GRACE. Rather, let us be encouraged that we have A BEGINNING IN GRACE. And let us only look at our imperfect beginning to produce further and stronger effort and striving on our part toward perfection, and to keep us in a humble state. AND in the time of discouragement and despair with ourselves let us consider and look at ourselves as Christ does, as one whom He has chosen, and who He is making fit to be His bride. He VALUES US BY WHAT WE SHALL BE, BY THAT WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN/ELECTED FOR. And further, think of the angels. Do they not minister to those who are little, little in their own eyes, and little in the eyes of the world?

The point being, our Lord would NOT HAVE US TO DESPISE LITTLE THINGS. And especially those little things which are His. For it is He, Christ, who RAISES THE WORTH OF THE LITTLE, BOTH PLACES AND PERSONS. Is not this the case with Bethlehem. We read in Micah 5:2, **“BUT THOU, BETHLEHEM EPHRATAH, THOUGH THOU BE LITTLE AMONG THE THOUSANDS OF JUDAH, YET OUT OF THEE SHALL HE COME FORTH UNTO ME THAT IS TO BE RULER IN ISRAEL; WHOSE GOINGS FORTH HAVE BEEN FROM OF OLD, FROM EVERLASTING.”** And was not this the case with the SECOND TEMPLE, whose outward

magnificence was far short of the first temple, but whose GLORY WAS GREATER because CHRIST CAME TO IT!!! In Haggai 2:9 we read, **“THE GLORY OF THIS LATTER HOUSE SHALL BE GREATER THAN OF THE FORMER, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS: AND IN THIS PLACE WILL I GIVE PEACE, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS.”** And SO IT IS WITH ALL WHO ARE CHRIST’S. Is not this THE STORY OF ISRAEL. In Deuteronomy 7:6-7 we read, **“FOR THOU ART AN HOLY PEOPLE UNTO THE LORD THY GOD: THE LORD THY GOD HATH CHOSEN THEE TO BE A SPECIAL PEOPLE UNTO HIMSELF, ABOVE ALL PEOPLE THAT ARE UPON THE FACE OF THE EARTH. THE LORD DID NOT SET HIS LOVE UPON YOU, NOR CHOOSE YOU, BECAUSE YE WERE MORE IN NUMBER THAN ANY PEOPLE; FOR YE WERE THE FEWEST OF ALL PEOPLE.”** And is this not THE STORY OF DAVID the shepherd king who, when Samuel came to the house of Jesse to anoint a king from one of Jesse’s sons was not even summoned to be considered with the rest of his brethren, and yet, WHO BECAME THE GREATEST OF ISRAEL’S KINGS, AND FROM WHOM CHRIST DESCENDED, OF WHOM IT IS SPOKEN, **“HE SHALL BE GREAT, AND SHALL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE HIGHEST: AND THE LORD GOD SHALL GIVE UNTO HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID:.”** And is not this story of the disciples, as we read concerning Peter and John in Acts 4:13, **“NOW WHEN THEY SAW THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN, AND PERCEIVED THAT THEY WERE UNLEARNED AND IGNORANT MEN, THEY MARVELLED; AND THEY TOOK KNOWLEDGE OF THEM, THAT THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS.”** And in this same regard it is spoken of all who are Christ’s. In Matthew 5:3,5, we read, **“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT: FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN...BLESSED ARE THE MEEK: FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.”**

AND, as it was with Israel, and as it is with the saints personally, so it is with the CHURCH AS A LOCAL BODY OF BELIEVERS. There is the DAY, the SEASON of SMALL THINGS. The DAY/SEASON wherein GRACE is SMALL AT FIRST. And to His Church in such a humble condition Christ speaks today as He did then, Luke 12:32, **“FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK, FOR IT IS YOUR FATHER’S GOOD PLEASURE TO GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM.”**

Our Lord WOULD NOT HAVE US TO DESPISE LITTLE THINGS!!! FOR HE DOES INDEED RAISE THE WORTH OF LITTLE THINGS, PLACES AND PERSONS, YOU AND ME, AND ALL WHO ARE HIS!!! And let us remember there is the APPOINTED DAY OF SMALL THINGS. The prophet Zechariah writes in Zechariah 4:10, **“FOR WHO HATH DESPISED THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS...”** As said before, ‘the things of greatest perfection are longest in coming.’ And in nothing is this truer than with man as a NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST. And concerning this there is THE APPOINTED DAY/TIME/SEASON, WHEN GRACE IS SMALL, though AFTERWARDS, IT IS RAISED TO THE HEAVENS.

It is in this sense first that the child of God is like **“SMOKING FLAX.”**

BUT NOT JUST AT THE BEGINNING, but afterwards as well, the child of God is like SMOKING FLAX. As GRACE RISES and GROWS in the believer IT IS NEVER FREE IN THIS LIFE, no matter it’s progress, from being MIXED/MINGLED WITH CORRUPTION. And it is in this sense that the saints no matter their progress are still SMOKING FLAX. God in His infinite wisdom has seen fit TO NOT REMOVE ALL CORRUPTION FROM HIS CHILDREN IN THIS LIFE. He has left some for us to fight against, to have conflict with. And it is for this reason that in this life THE PUREST ACTIONS OF MEN STILL HAVE NEED TO FOR CHRIST TO PERFUME THEM. One of the older saints wrote, ‘WHEN WE PRAY WE NEED TO PRAY AGAIN FOR CHRIST TO PARDON THE DEFECTS OF THEM.’

And we see instances in Scripture of the GREATEST OF SAINTS as still but **“SMOKING FLAX.”**

Was not this Moses at the Red Sea when God spoke to him in Exodus 14:15, **“AND THE LORD SAID UNTO MOSES, WHEREFORE CRIEST THOU UNTO ME? SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY GO FORWARD:”** And was not this Moses when later, he smote the Rock, concerning which God said unto him in Numbers 20:12, **“AND THE LORD SPAKE UNTO MOSES AND AARON, BECAUSE YE BELIEVED ME NOT, TO SANCTIFY ME IN THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THEREFORE YE SHALL NOT BRING THIS CONGREGATION INTO THE LAND WHICH I HAVE GIVEN THEM.”**

And was not this David’s condition in the experience of which he writes in Psalm 31:22, **“FOR I SAID IN MY HASTE (SUDDENLY IN MY FEAR), I AM CUT OFF FROM BEFORE THINE EYES: NEVERTHELESS THOU HEARDEST THE VOICE OF MY SUPPLICATIONS WHEN I CRIED UNTO THEE.”** And certainly, this was David’s condition in his sin with Bathsheba.

And as well, was this not Asaph’s condition in Psalm 73 where in verses 21 and 22 he repents concerning his struggling with the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. There we read, **“THUS MY HEART WAS GRIEVED, AND I WAS PRICKED IN MY REINS. SO FOOLISH WAS I, AND IGNORANT: I WAS AS A BEAST BEFORE THEE.”**

And is not this Habakkuk’s condition in Habakkuk 1:2, when he cries out, **“O LORD, HOW LONG SHALL I CRY, AND THOU WILT NOT HEAR! EVEN CRY OUT UNTO THEE OF VIOLENCE, AND THOU WILT NOT SAVE!”**

And what shall we say of Peter in his denial of Christ, or later, where it is recorded in the book of Galatians that Paul rebuked him because of his behavior when certain Jews from Jerusalem observed him eating with Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14).

And what of Paul when he speaks of despairing of life in II Corinthians 1:8: **“FOR WE WOULD NOT, BRETHREN, HAVE YOU IGNORANT OF OUR TROUBLE WHICH CAME TO US IN ASIA, THAT WE WERE PRESSED OUT OF MEASURE, ABOVE STRENGTH, INSOMUCH THAT WE DESPAIRED EVEN OF LIFE:”**

In all these, the GREATEST OF SAINTS, we see they were in this life, even after advancing in grace, still but **“SMOKING FLAX.”** If with them, shall it not be with us, and SO MUCH MORE?

I have already referred to the great Puritan, Richard Sibbes. Allow me to directly quote him here from his great sermon on this very text. He writes concerning the believers condition of having grace mingled with corruption, **“THE GROUND OF THIS MIXTURE IS, THAT WE CARRY ABOUT US A DOUBLE PRINCIPLE, GRACE AND NATURE. THE END OF IT IS ESPECIALLY TO PRESERVE US FROM THOSE TWO DANGEROUS ROCKS WHICH OUR NATURES ARE PRONE TO DASH UPON, SECURITY AND PRIDE. AND TO FORCE US TO PITCH OUR REST ON JUSTIFICATION, NOT SANCTIFICATION, WHICH, BESIDES, HATH SOME SOIL.”** What spiritual wisdom and insight Sibbes distills in these words. Never are we so sanctified **THAT WE MAY LOOK AT OURSELVES AND BE SATISFIED CONCERNING OUR SALVATION.** There will always be that corruption remaining within us, those defects, which when observed by us, will throw us back to our **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE IN CHRIST REDEMPTION** - as the ground and basis of our salvation. Paul writes in Romans 3:24, **“BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS:”**

Sibbes further writes, **“FROM THIS MIXTURE IT IS, THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE SO DIFFERENT JUDGEMENTS OF THEMSELVES, LOOKING SOMETIMES AT THE WORK OF GRACE, SOMETIMES AT THE REMAINDER OF CORRUPTION, AND WHEN THEY LOOK UPON THAT, THEN THEY THINK THEY HAVE NO**

GRACE, THOUGH THEY LOVE CHRIST IN HIS ORDINANCES AND CHILDREN...SOMETIMES WELL PERSUADED OF THEMSELVES, SOMETIMES AT A LOSS.”

Do we not all see ourselves in his words? Do we not all see ourselves in this verse? Are we not all, at both the beginning of our spiritual life, and afterward, but **“SMOKING FLAX?”** And does not this cause us to CAST OURSELVES ALL THE MORE UPON THE WORK OF CHRIST IN OUR BEHALF. And do we not, all the more, see OUR PERSONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS AS FILTHY RAGES, JUST AS SCRIPTURE DECLARES CONCERNING IT IN ISAIAH 64:6, **“BUT WE ARE ALL AS AN UNCLEAN THING, AND ALL OUR RIGHTEOUSNESSES ARE AS FILTHY RAGS...”**

IT IS THE GREAT AND INFINITE WISDOM OF GOD, AND THE LOVE OF GOD, THAT HAS SO ORDERED THINGS, - THAT IN THIS LIFE THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THAT DOUBLE PRINCIPLE WITHIN US, NATURE AND GRACE, AND THAT THROUGHOUT OUR LIFE HERE, WE ARE TO FIGHT AND CONFLICT AGAINST THAT CORRUPTION THAT REMAINS WITH US. AND THIS IS TO THE END THAT WE MIGHT NOT FIND SECURITY IN OURSELVES AS WE ARE PRONE TO DO, OR BE GUILTY OF THAT SIN WHICH CAUSED THE FALL OF GOD’S GREATEST ANGEL LUCIFER – THE SIN OF PRIDE.

And finally this morning, may we find GREAT COMFORT AND PEACE in the fact that **“THE SMOKING FLAX SHALL HE NOT QUENCH...”** Rather, with us all when we are in this condition, and our light is dim, our heat is little, and both, mingled with smoke, and it seems we are about to be extinguished, that He will in HIS GRACE, AND BY HIS SPIRIT, REKINDLE US, AND PRESERVE OUR LIGHT, AND PRESERVE OUR HEAT, AND THAT IN THE MIDST OF THE TURBULENT AND SWELING WATERS OF OUR OWN CORRUPTION. This He did with PETER IN HIS BETRAYAL, AND THIS HE DID WITH DOUBTING THOMAS, AND THIS HE DID WITH MARK AS WE READ IN ACTS AND II TIMOTHY 4:11. AND THIS HE DOES FOR YOU AND I, AND ALL WHO ARE HIS CHILDREN. AND THIS HE DOES FOR HIS CHURCHES IN THE WORLD.

And may I say one final thing to those here this morning who have yet to come to Christ for salvation. You no doubt look at yourself and think you see no working or evidence of grace whatsoever. Indeed, you focus on what is not there knowing something of what the true believer is. And yet I say to you this morning, do not despise the day of small things. Look again and see if you do not indeed detect something of the working of grace toward you. The very fact that you think you see none at all testifies to you that you are thinking concerning it. And I ask you, does not such thoughts arise from the workings of grace. Again, do not despise the day of small things, you may have much more of God’s grace being exercised toward you than you realize.

LET US PRAY.