

“The Wrong Move?”—Isaiah 42:14-21

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Wrong Move?”, is Isaiah 42:14-16 → *For a long time I have held My peace; I have kept still and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

It has been said that “hind-sight is better than foresight.” Such a statement is usually used to describe a person’s perspective once an experienced has passed. It may have to do with regret, thinking that if you knew back then what you know now, you may have done things differently. Maybe. If you would have made your decisions differently or moved in a different direction, things would have turned out better . . . or so you think. In all the “woulda, shoulda, coulda’s” you may see where you made wrong moves in your life but ultimately have to recognize that there is nothing you can do to change it what took place. You can only

deal with the present.

What happens when a person thinks the LORD is making the wrong move in his life in the midst of adverse situations, painful struggles and/or misfortunate tragedies. Such experiences become huge challenges of faith, especially if you are a person who trusts in Yahweh and His saving work in your life. Temptations abound to doubt His presence, question His authority, accuse Him of being unfair by allowing such calamity to fall upon you or even turn away from Him in unbelief. You may feel like He made a wrong move on your behalf in your life.

God's people in the Old Testament found themselves asking about God's "moving" in their lives many times, especially during those times they felt the oppression of another nation in some manner. Their very existence as **God's people** happened by His initiative and doing. In Deuteronomy 4:33-38 Moses reminded the people that Yahweh took them to be *a nation **for Himself** from the midst of another nation*. He delivered them *by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror* from their Egyptian slavery. He let them *hear His voice . . . out of heaven and speaking out of the midst of the fire*. He brought them *out of Egypt with His own presence, by His great power . . . to give* them the Promised Land. They experienced Yahweh in ways that no one else had ever experienced Him! They were privileged to have a relationship with the living Lord of heaven and earth.

Why? Why did Yahweh make this move to choose for Himself a nation out of all the pagan nations on the earth? So He could move in the lives of all people on earth to fulfill His promise of an Offspring from a woman Who would restore a perfect relationship with He and all mankind again (cf. Genesis 3:15). This nation existed to bring Yahweh glory by being *a light for the nations, that His salvation may reach to the end of the earth* (cf. Isaiah 49:6). Imperative to shining as this *light for the nations* was to give witness to the LORD as the only living God in the universe amidst the idolatry of all the other peoples of the world. It is summed up in what we call the 1st Commandment: *I am Yahweh your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me* (cf. Exodus 20:2-3).

Unfortunately, sinners not only make the wrong moves into idolatry but are actually prone to do so because of original sin passed on from our parents (cf. Genesis 5:3; Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-24). The context of Isaiah in which our text is embedded speaks out against idolatry in the form of statues to which people pray and bow down, offer sacrifices and look to for help in time of trouble. We in our culture recognize how futile it is to make something with our hands and think it is that which brings us fortune, security and happiness in life, not to mention “a better place” in the “eternal afterlife” . . . or do we?

It may not be a carved image but it could be a material possession that you truly believe you could not live without. It may not be a little

statue for worship but it could be personalities, celebrities or other activities which override living according to God's Word, which reveals God's way to provide for and protect you eternally. It may not be an idol or metal image carved or forged for worship but it could be the currency stamped with the inscription "legal tender" for which you may use and abuse others. It may not be an inanimate object but it could be your living according to your own selfish passions and desires. Idolatry is a matter of the sinful heart which takes God's good creation and believes it to be the creator and sustainer of life (cf. Romans 1:18-23).

When God's people move in the direction of idolatry He will move in the direction of discipline to bring them back into a perfect relationship with Himself as their loving Father. Hebrews 12:5-11 describes the discipline of the heavenly **Father** for His children, even applying it to experiencing persecution. There it says *the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives*. Speaking of this *discipline as God . . . treating you as sons*, it gives the example of *earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained*

by it. Thus, it may appear as though He has made a wrong move because of the pain it brings but it actually is the right move because of *the peaceful fruit of righteousness* it brings.

When Yahweh chose His people Israel and redeemed them from their slavery to Egypt through the blood of a lamb (cf. Exodus 12), He established them with great blessings in a land He gave them. Unfortunately, they gave into the temptations to idolatry by arrogant entitlement, as well as worshiping other gods along side of Yahweh, against which He had warned them in Deuteronomy 8:17-20. When His call to repentance through His prophets over and over again fell on deaf ears and eyes blind to His will and Word (cf. Isaiah 42:18-19), strict discipline was the last resort—oppression by a heathen nation, many times accompanied by slavery and deportation from their land.

In the midst of the Israelites living in captivity to the Babylonians because they had made the wrong moves in their lives, our text describes Yahweh's desire to continue making the right moves to restore their relationship with Himself. Verse 14 of our text says: *For a long time I have held My peace; I have kept still and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant.* He described His inability to keep silent any longer. He wanted to His people to experience His grace and wanted to deliver them from their bondage, both physically and spiritually. It was time to “give birth” to His gracious

promise of salvation for all people on earth through His promised Savior.

While the deliverance of His people from their physical bondage through His servant, Cyrus, king of Assyria (cf. Isaiah 45:1), did bring them back to their land temporarily in 538 BC, it looked forward to what His *Servant*, Jesus, Whom He would send, would do to bring about the spiritual freedom from the slavery to sin for all people! He will removed the obstacles of sin which hinder people from turning to Him in repentance and faith (verse 15) and fulfill His promise in verse 16 of our text: *I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.* And His reassurance to us: *These are the things **I do**, and **I do not forsake them**.*

Thus, Yahweh moved in our lives in the ultimate expression of His love for us—He took on human flesh in the Person & Work of Jesus to deliver us from our bondage to sin by His suffering and death on the cross and rising from the dead to give us new life, now and eternally. Faithful to His covenant not to forsake us He has given us His Holy Spirit so we can turn to Him in repentance and faith, trusting in the atoning work of Jesus to carry us to heaven as He carries us through the struggles, tragedies, adverse circumstances and painful situations of life now.

In Israel's situation which our text addressed, the purpose of their

experience of the oppression which Yahweh allowed is revealed. It was intended to produce discomfort as an “idolatry reality check” to awaken God’s people to their sin of idolatry and move them to see His grace in repentance. Such experiences may very likely serve as idolatry reality checks in your own life, moving you to see areas of idolatrous sin in your life. They too can move you toward the Lord in repentance so you can see the eternal love of your heavenly Father for you in Christ Jesus (cf. Romans 8:35-39). Then the Holy Spirit will move you to the Lord Jesus in His written Word where you are reassured of forgiveness of your sins; He will move you to receive forgiveness by hearing the Gospel and receiving the Lord’s Supper amongst the gathered believers in worship; He will move you to in trust and obedience to His will in *the peaceful fruit of righteousness*.

As a result of what Yahweh has done for you in Jesus, you have been delivered from your slavery to sin so that you can walk in His light and not walk in the deafness and blindness of sin. You can live in the newness of life that He gives in Christ, with the promise that the LORD will never forsake you as you move through this life and into eternal life, trusting in and moving towards the LORD every step of the way by the power the Holy Spirit has given you. Amen.

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light

*(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),
and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*

(Ephesians 5:8-10)

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