

Sermon for Sunday, December 3, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"GOD'S SURPRISE"

Isaiah 42:1-9

Text: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Isaiah 42:6,7

God has always been full of surprises! When the Hebrews languished in slavery in Egypt, God surprised them by sending Moses and delivering them through a series of miracles. When they were trapped by the Red Sea on the one hand and the Egyptians on the other, God surprised them by dividing the very waters before them. When they were starving in the desert, God surprised them by sending manna. When the time came to enter the promised land, God surprised them by making the walls of Jericho fall down before them. But God had some other surprises for them, too. When they rebelled against his laws and when they violated his commandments he surprised them with quick and sure punishment.

During all of those early centuries there was one man in particular who wasn't surprised by God. The Bible says he was a man after God's own heart. He understood God and because he did, God loved him and blessed him. It wasn't that he was such a good man for he did some pretty terrible things. But when he realized what he had done, he always repented and asked God to forgive him. His name was David and God made the Hebrews a great nation under David. But, in the centuries to follow, there were few who understood God. As a consequence, the nation was divided and the ten tribes that made up one part of the divided nation were eventually destroyed and literally disappeared from the face of the earth. They thought they were somebody special but when God punished them for their sins they must have been awfully surprised.

The remaining two tribes that came to be known as Judah lasted a while longer, but they were surprised one day to find themselves in captivity in Babylon. They had not followed God's way nor understood him very well after all and there they were, slaves in Babylon. Finally, they were permitted to return home--at least a remnant of them--and they tried to pick up the pieces but things were never to be the same. But they remembered the days of David and in their hearts there was a dream--a dream of a day when God would restore the kingdom of David. He would send a king who was a descendant of David. And this man, anointed of God, would make the nation great again. That was the dream in their hearts that kept them going all through those hard, tough years. Through all the heartbreak and humiliation and despair they could endure the worst because they had a dream. One day--maybe soon--God would surprise them and send them a king.

Now, the fact is, not everybody was looking for the same kind of a king. John Bright, in his book "The Kingdom of God", tells us there were three basic groups among the Jews and each of them expected God to act in a different way. First, there were the Zealots. They looked for political restoration and freedom from Rome. They were looking for God to send a great military leader who would rally the forces, put together a great army and lead them to victory and freedom. Some say that Judas was a Zealot. They say that when he betrayed Jesus he was really trying to force his hand and make him form an army.

Another group was called the Pharisees. They thought that if they kept the laws perfectly, if they followed all of the religious injunctions, that God would make them into a holy nation. So they looked for a religious leader who would keep the

laws perfectly. That's why they couldn't understand a man like Jesus who broke the Sabbath, who associated with common people, who healed on holy days. They would certainly be surprised if God sent somebody like that!

A third group were mystics of a sort. They believed God would intervene through some catastrophic event and the Son of Man would come in clouds of glory with a host of heavenly angels to establish the Kingdom of God. They would certainly be surprised if the descendant of David came any other way. And they certainly would be surprised to imagine him being born in poverty in a filthy barn.

As it turned out, all three groups were surprised by God. The Zealots wouldn't let go of their dream of freedom and because of their rebellion in 70 A.D., Titus destroyed Jerusalem. Then in 132 A.D. Hadrian's legions finally wiped them out forever. As for the Pharisees, they couldn't produce a holy nation and even got blood on their hands when they crucified a man named Jesus because some of the people were beginning to follow him in the absurd notion that he was God's messiah. As for the mystics, they withdrew into their own little monastic enclaves and today the archaeologists have dug up some of the ruins of a people who disappeared and nobody really knows what happened to them. And whatever did happen, their dreams died with them.

You see, what happened was that God surprised them all. God's way turned out to be a baby who was headed for death on a cross. Somehow they couldn't convert their dreams to God's way. People today still have all sorts of dreams about how to cure the ills of the world, but God's way is still the way of the cross. You see, the world doesn't need any more social theories--we've got more now than we can follow. We don't need any more moral laws--we can't obey the ones we've got. We don't need any more scientific achievement to make us good, we've got more technology now than we have the moral power to use it wisely and well.

No, Jesus said, "No man cometh to the father but by me." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." That's God surprise. The only way to get to him is through Jesus. Dr. Robert Lee, a famous Baptist preacher of another generation, tells of his conversion to God's way. Living in the country he had been attending a revival meeting and was convinced that he was lost. The next day as he plowed, he stopped at the end of the row. There in the fence corner he knelt down and prayed, "If one must accept Jesus to be saved, then I accept Him." That next Sunday he walked down the church aisle to publicly profess Jesus as his Savior. "I do not remember the minister's text," he wrote, "but I remember the song they sang:

'Out of my bondage, sorrow and night;
Jesus, I come! Jesus I come!
Into thy freedom, gladness, and light;
Jesus, I come to thee.'

And then Dr. Lee said this, "The peace which came to me in the fence corner is in my heart until this day."

Yes, "What must I do to be saved?" cried the Philippian jailer. Back came the reply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." That's God's surprise. It is so simple--so simple, yet we will never be prepared for Christmas until we are prepared for God's way of salvation--and that means giving our lives to Jesus.

But not only were the Jews not prepared for the surprise of conversion to Jesus, neither were they prepared for God's surprising demand for consecration. One day

Jesus was telling some followers what it meant to be his disciple and there occurs one of the saddest verses in the Bible. It reads, "After that many turned back and followed him no more." And Jesus turned to his disciples--how sad and disappointed he must have sounded--and said, "will you also go away?" Back during the first world war General Foch was made Commander of all the allied forces. When General Pershing placed the American Army under his command he said, "Infantry, artillery, aviation--all that we have are yours. Dispose of them as you will." That's the kind of consecration God demands of us. Do you remember how Jesus put it? "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." Again, "No man can love two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will cling to the one and dispise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." He said, "If any man would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me."

D. T. Niles, that great Christian leader of India, tells of seeing an Indian woman standing on the banks of the sacred river Ganges. At her side stood a handsome, healthy boy and in her arms was a sickly infant. A few hours later he saw her standing there with the sickly infant still in her arms but the beautiful boy was gone. Dismayed he questioned her and she admitted that she had thrown her son into the river as a sacrifice to her gods. "But why did you not give the sickly one who may not live anyway," he questioned. Rising to her full height she replied, "We give our gods our best." Poor, misguided woman--how pitiful and how useless. Yet, for those of us who know the surprising demands of consecration of the living God, can we say in such commitment, "I give my saviour my best."? Can we like General Pershing say, "All that I have is yours, dispose of it as you will?"

Yes, God's surprise--the surprise of conversion to Jesus, the surprise of consecration. Note finally the surprising courage God demands. On Black Friday when the chants of "crucify him; crucify him" rang through the city, where were the crowds who hailed him and cheered him on Palm Sunday? Why even his own disciples forsook him and fled. Even Peter cursed and swore that he didn't know him. And when he hung in dying agony on the pain-drenched cross of Calvary, those who loved him watched from afar.

In the circles in which most of you move, it takes a great deal of courage to stand up and speak out for Jesus. Yet, the people you associate with are perhaps the most desperate people in the world today. How they need to know about Jesus--and how can they know unless you are converted to him, are consecrated to him, and have the courage to speak out for him. Many of you football buffs will remember Bill Glass, all-pro defensive end for 12 years with the Cleveland Browns. Bill left football at the peak of his career to become an evangelist. Even while he was still an active player, he had the courage among those tough football players to speak out for Jesus and as a result led some of his teammates to Jesus. Recently Bill Glass went to the Correctional Institution in Marion, Ohio to share his Saviour. The first night turned into what seemed a nightmare of embarrassment. The prisoners hooted, laughed, ridiculed. Several walked out--then returned. Others refused to stand during the hymn singing, yet they stayed even though a cold north wind began to blow. It took courage for Bill Glass to stand up in front of that crowd and talk about Jesus, but that's just what he did. Later, one of the convicts expressed it this way. "We didn't want nobody preachin' at us. We've been preached at by everybody. But we wanted to hear Bill Glass talk about football. But after that first night we just wanted to hear more about God."

It is advent--a time when we look forward to the birth of God's Son. But God is full of surprises. He surprised the world by sending a babe born in a manger and he

requires men to be converted to this man Jesus. He surprises us by demanding a total consecration that puts all that we are and have at his command. And he surprises us by requiring courage--courage to stand up for Jesus and to speak out for him.

When Bill Glass finished his series at that Ohio prison, one of the inmates said, "Now, I'm free. With Jesus Christ I'm more free than the guards who go home at night." There are all sorts of prisoners in the world today. They long for a word, a man, who will set them free. It may come as a surprise to you, but God is waiting for someone just like you to have the courage to speak a good word for Jesus.

E. T. Miller, that great Christian leader of India, tells of seeing an Indian woman standing in the banks of the sacred river Ganges. At her side stood a husband, heavily laden with his pack on a stick balanced across his back. A few hours later he was standing there with the stick leaning to his right but the beautiful boy was gone. He questioned her and she admitted that she had thrown her son into the river as a sacrifice to her gods. "But why did you not give the stick and the boy to some other god?" he questioned. "Why did you not give the stick and the boy to some other god?" he questioned. "I gave my son to my god," she replied. "I gave my son to my god," she replied. "I gave my son to my god," she replied. "I gave my son to my god," she replied.

Yet God's surprise--the surprise of conversion to Jesus, the surprise of consecration, more finally the surprising courage God demands. On Black Friday when the streets of "prosperity" Birmingham were empty, there were the streets who paraded him and cheered him on. Why even his own disciples forsake him and fled. Even Peter turned and swore that he didn't know him. And when he came in with a group on the Galilean shores of Capernaum, those who loved him watched from afar.

In the circles in which most of you move, it takes a great deal of courage to stand up and speak out for Jesus. Yet, the people you associate with are people that most despise people in the world today. How they need to know about Jesus--and how they know unless you are converted to him, are consecrated to him, and have the courage to speak out for him. Many of you football fans will remember Bill Glass, all-pro defensive end for 12 years with the Cleveland Browns. Will Glass football at the peak of his career to become an evangelist. Even while he was still an active player, he had the courage among those tough football players to speak out for Jesus and as a result had some of his teammates to Jesus. Recently Bill Glass went to the Correctional Institution in Marion, Ohio to share the Gospel. The first night tucked into a nightstand of imprisonment. The prisoners hooted, laughed, ridiculed. Several walked over and returned. Glass refused to stand during the hymn singing. They started yelling through a cold north wind storm to show. It took courage for Bill Glass to stand up in front of that crowd and talk about Jesus, but that's just what he did. Later one of the converts came up to him and said, "We didn't want nobody preaching at us. We've been preached at by everybody. But we wanted to hear Bill Glass talk about football. The other night I didn't want to hear about God."

It is a sad story when we look forward to the birth of God's Son, but God is full of surprise. He surprised the world by sending a babe born in a manger and he