

The Messiah Has Answers

☆ to depression (vv.1-4)

☆ to pride (vv.5-6)

In the name of Jesus, the LORD's **Messiah**, dear fellow servants of the LORD:

One of my greatest fears as a child was “evangelism.” Our pastor thundered from the pulpit that everyone had to go out door-to-door. He wanted to copy Dr. James Kennedy's “Evangelism Explosion” back in the 1960's. I was terrified at the thought of sharing my faith with strangers. Meanwhile, my first job as a fourth and fifth grader was working for a Fuller Brush salesman going door-to-door. We had to introduce ourselves, hand them a catalog and say, “The Fuller Brush man will be around to take your order in a day or so.” Two cents apiece, and then Mr. Bates would take us out for A&W root beer floats.

Once I walked up some steps to a yard gate. As my eyes cleared the sidewalk, a German shepherd raised his head and growled. I went on to the next house. Years later my cousin and I made calls for “Tuesday Night Kingdom Workers.” In the Pacific Northwest 85-90% are unchurched. We made eight calls, no one home. Finally at the ninth house, a man was washing his pickup. When he found out we were from a church, he got his eight-year-old daughter to talk to us and went back to washing his pickup.

Over the years I've realized there are many effective ways to evangelize. Sharing your faith is your life. But what prevents us is always the same. Fear bombards us from both sides – **depression** on the left, **pride** on the right. Here's what helps me: Jesus **The Messiah Has Answers** first...

☆ to depression (vv.1-4)

Does it surprise you that Jesus was sometimes tempted by **depression**? We don't like to think of Him that way, yet the Holy Spirit tells us, *“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:15f NIV84)

In today's text from Isaiah, the Holy Spirit gives us a window into Jesus' loving heart 700 years before He was born. Jesus is speaking here as the Servant of the LORD in one of Isaiah's *Servant Songs*. As the pre-incarnate Christ, Jesus is talking to us who live in what were once called the distant *“islands”* (NIV) or *“coastlands”* (ESV) far from ancient Israel. *“Listen to me, you islands,”* He says. *“Hear this, you distant nations. Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.”* Think of how the angel came to the virgin Mary and how stepfather Joseph was also told to name the baby boy “Jesus.” Before you were born, God knew you by name.

So why would Jesus be tempted by **depression**? He had everything going for Him. He described how God the Father gifted Him for His ministry: *“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.”* A *“polished arrow”* is the silver bullet for make-believe enemies like werewolves and vampires in *Twilight*, or real enemies like sin, death and hell. Jesus was *“concealed”* like an arrow in God's *“quiver.”* God protected His **Messiah** from cruel King Herod killing all the baby boys in Bethlehem. God warned the Magi in a dream to go back home another way. Another angel told Joseph to flee with the Child and His mother to Egypt, and then to return again. God protected His Son for the sake of our salvation. God had a plan. He said to Jesus, *“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”* In His Epiphany Jesus shone in *“splendor”* as the true God, beloved Son and Savior of the world.

Yet Jesus says, *“I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.”* Imagine working hard for the Lord, then having family members ridicule you for being crazy.

Jesus' family thought He had lost His mind. Some of you don't need to imagine. You also know what it's like to do a job extremely well, only to have your classmates and coworkers stab you in the back the way Peter denied Jesus and Judas betrayed Him and all the rest forsook Him and fled. To spend your whole life working for God, then end up dead for it? **Depression** would come easy, wouldn't it?

Who of us has not felt inadequate, not good enough to be Christ's witnesses as father, mother, son, daughter, worker, student, teacher, pastor, organist or prison ministry volunteer – that Jesus deserves and we so much want to be? We feel inadequate before things go wrong, such as John the Baptist literally losing his head for admonishing King Herod for adultery. We too are tempted to **depression**. But like diagnosing a disease, it helps to recognize the sin in order to find the cure. As the LORD said earlier through Isaiah: ***"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."*** (30:15 NIV84) This insight has helped me more times than I can count. When I'm feeling down, I confess it: "God, you deserve joyful praise and thanks from me. You have promised to make my troubles work out for my eternal good. Forgive me. Help me minimize my fear and maximize your praise."

That's the sorrow part of repentance. But the ***"rest"*** and ***"quiet trust [which] is your strength"*** comes from these words of Jesus which overcame His temptation to **depression**. Jesus remembered in His prayers: ***"Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God."***

✧ to pride (vv.5-6)

"But, Pastor? We deserve God's punishment!" Yes, we do! But when we admit the truth about our sins, God wants to show us the truth about His mercy that triumphs over judgment. He wants to give us rewards of grace. Don't forget. He made Jesus guilty for all the sins of the world. God crushed Jesus under all our unkind words and impatient acts from our **pride** and sin. And when Jesus shed His innocent blood for every proud thought and word of mine and yours, God rewarded Him with glorious splendor in resurrection life. ***"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*** (Romans 6:4 NIV84) Now all the good that Jesus deserves from God, He wants to give us for Jesus' sake.

We echo Jesus **The Messiah**: ***"He...formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself....I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength."*** Ever since God knit you together in your mother's womb He has been watching over you as your loving Lord and Savior. We are His witnesses in this congregation here called ***"Jacob...Israel."***

Sometimes **pride** wants to claim the good. Sometimes false **pride** thinks we are no good. We're like the guy with the four-wheel-drive that never ventures off the pavement or the boys with their snow mobiles that never leave the back yard. Makes no sense with the power of **The Messiah** either. Jesus **Has Answers – to pride** of both kinds. Instead of thinking small, listen to God's awesome promise which surprised His Son in His humble state as our Savior: ***"And now the LORD says... It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***

We're surrounded by examples. One member had a job move that could easily have ruined his radio ministry of the Gospel. God used it to expand *A Reason for Hope* from Austin, Texas, to the Twin Cities of Minnesota, so you can pick up more sermon CD's from the fellowship table today. See the round window above the altar? Remember we thought New Life would only support world missions? Now God has taken us to China twice and brought world cultures to our own back yard. Prison Ministry is just another example of God's awesome grace from **The Messiah** who truly **Has Answers – to depression and to pride**. For sure, for sure, Jesus died for you. Without a doubt He has bigger plans for you than you can imagine. ***"You are my witnesses"*** (Isaiah 43:10; 44:8), God says. Don't fear evangelism. Embrace it like a champion slugger with his favorite bat, like a downhill racer on the edges of lightning, like the Savior of the world bringing light to you. Nothing can hold Him back from blessing you too even now. **The Messiah Has Answers** to lift up and empower you to tell the wonders of God. Amen.