

Sermon  
Lanier Christian Church  
July 30, 2017

## **When God Rolls Up His Sleeves** SL#1

Isaiah 59:9-17

In November of 1988 a 19 yr old woman fell asleep behind the wheel of her car at about 2:15 in the morning. Her car plunged thru a guardrail and was dangling by its left rear tire.

A half dozen passing motorists stopped, grabbed some ropes from one of their vehicles, tied the ropes to the back of her car, & hung on until fire units arrived. A ladder was extended from below to help stabilize the car while firefighters tied the vehicle to tow trucks with cables and chains.

One of the rescuers later said "Every time we would move the car, she would yell and scream. She was in terrible pain."

For nearly 2 ½ hours police officers, tow truck drivers, firefighters and passers-by (about 25 people in all) – worked together to secure the car and pull the woman to safety. All through the episode, the woman kept repeating a phrase over and over to rescuers. She kept saying: "I'll do it myself." (November 20, 1988, the Los Angeles Times)

This woman was in horrible pain. She was pinned inside her car. She was unable to change her circumstances or save herself from her danger. Ultimately, it took the efforts of nearly 25 people to rescue her from potential death...And yet, she kept thinking she could solve the problem all by herself. Does that sound familiar? Are you one today that would say "I'll do it myself?" That may be OK in certain

situations but when it comes to our spiritual lives, that independent spirit often gets in the way of God doing a great work within us. For instance:

**1. We often try to fix our sin problem by ourselves.**

**SL#2**

The Bible tells us that this has been the problem for mankind almost from the beginning. We've been trapped by sin... and we continue to contend that we can fix the problem all by ourselves.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sin against God by eating of the tree.

And what was the first thing they noticed once they'd eaten of the fruit? They were naked.

So what did they do to cover their nakedness?

They sewed together fig leaves for garments. But these clothes must have been kind of breezy because when God comes calling - they hide. Why did they hide? Adam says it was because they were naked.

Their homemade clothing couldn't quite get the job done. So God had to fix the problem.

It says in Genesis 3:21

*"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."*

He covered their nakedness.

He helped them deal with the results of sinfulness.

Now, here in Isaiah 59 we're told about the trap that we find ourselves in. We've been trapped by our sins.

LOOK at Isaiah 59:10 - "Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we

stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead."

Then in vs. 12: *"For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities"*

And then in vs. 15: *"Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey..."*

You can't get away from the difficulties that sin brings. Even when you SHUN evil... you become a prey sometimes...you get caught up in it.

Now, a lot of people TRY to deal with their sin by pretending that their sin doesn't exist. As Mark Twain once said: "Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side, which he never shows to anybody."

Some people DO succeed (for awhile) in covering up that dark side.

There are news stories every day that tell of someone that has tried to cover up their sin and are eventually found out.

Just like Adam and Eve in the garden many of us think we can hide our sin. We think our home-made garments can cover our nakedness. But, it doesn't work. As Numbers 32:23 warns us *"... you may be sure that your sin will find you out."*

You can only cover your shame for a period of time.

Because, eventually it will come to light.

As Isaiah 59:12 says: "For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us."

Our attempts to deal with our own shame and guilt from sin are like the woman trapped in her car... hanging perilously by one wheel on the guardrail...we hang by the thread of our own devices in trying to deal with something only God can deal with. So, thankfully...

## **2. God Got Involved and worked out Salvation for us** **– SL#3**

Isaiah 59 tells us that God looked around for someone to help and there wasn't anybody who could save us from the damage of our sin.

There was no one to cover the nakedness of our shame and guilt.

So what did God do? ....This is the great part.

Look again at Isaiah 59:16-17

*"He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."*

He couldn't stand to see us trapped in our sins...enslaved by our guilt and shame.

So... He put on His armor and He went to war for us.

No one else could do it... so his own ARM worked salvation for Him.

Now, this is an intriguing image that Isaiah has used before. Isaiah 52:10 says *"The LORD will lay BARE HIS HOLY ARM*

*in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God."*

It's like He rolled up His sleeves and He got down to business... because this is a serious matter for Him.

By contrast, when God created the heavens, Psalm 8 says: *"When I consider your heavens, the work of your **fingers**, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" - Psalm 8:3-4*

The heavens were finger-play for God. But when God saw our distress...When He saw the damage our sins and guilt and shame brought upon us... He put all of His power and might into solving our crisis. He rolled up His sleeves and got involved with everything that He had.

Nobody else could do it for us. Only God...

There are people who have a problem with that idea. Last year, Gallup did a poll for Baylor University to understand how some people viewed God. They found that nearly 25% of Americans see Him as a "Distant God" - a God who kicked off the human experiment on Planet Earth and then backed away to see what would happen. (From "USA Today" Sept. 12 2007)

I once heard a poem that reflected this mindset:

*God created the world in six days flat, then He said, I'll rest  
Then He let the thing into orbit swing to give it a dry run  
test*

*A million years went by and then He looked at the whirling blob*

*He shook His head and then He said:*

*"Oh well, it was only a six day job."*

A couple of years ago - physicist and Templeton Prize winner, Paul Davies commented "As a physicist, I feel very uncomfortable with a God who intervenes" in human affairs.

Thomas Jefferson had a similar problem with a personal God.

In 1820 Jefferson literally took a pair of scissors to the New Testament and cut out any verses that referred to miracles of any kind... including the resurrection. He believed Jesus was a highly moral teacher, but the idea that God could or would intrude upon the history of mankind deeply offended him.

Why would men like this reject the idea of God reaching down into our lives? Why? Because there are always people out there saying to God:

I'd rather do it myself!

I don't need your help!

I don't want your help!

They're uncomfortable with a God who wants to step into our lives and make a difference.

But Isaiah tells us that God is uncomfortable NOT stepping in.

Isaiah tells us that God created this world and then watched in dismay as it suffered from the wounds of its own wrongdoings.

He was disappointed, He was appalled and He could find no one else to solve the problem so He set about solving it Himself. He rolled up His sleeve and showed the power of His holy arm (Is. 52:10)

*He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. (Isaiah 59:17)*

God got down to the serious business of helping out you and me...helping us from ourselves!

Why did He do this?

**3. God got involved in our lives because He loves us.**

John 3:16 says *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* - KJV

God loved us and cared for us.

He looked at the world that our sins had damaged.

He looked at our lives filled with grief and pain.

And he ached with the sadness that drove Him to give us the ultimate gift... His only son. He rolled up His sleeves and got involved in our lives.

Now, that's not generally how people view God

In that survey I mentioned earlier... they found that:

- Not only did about 25% of people believe God was distant...
- Another 16% pictured Him as The Critical God who stands in judgment of us. But even though they saw Him as a critical God, they had little expectation of either divine wrath

or help.

· Another 30% or so believed in an Authoritarian God. He is controlling and angry toward what He sees. He wants us to shape up and fly right. And there are harsh judgments pending for those who don't.

In other words, nearly 70% of Americans in this survey visualize God as uncaring and unconcerned. Their kind of God doesn't care about them.

And if He cares at all, He stands in judgment and anger over their failings.

That's been the mindset of mankind down thru the ages. In their search for spiritual meaning, many through the centuries have created their own gods. Ancient people didn't love their gods... AND they didn't expect to have a god that loved them.

The gods were to be appeased.

Sacrifices were meant to buy them off.

And all along, God was "displeased" and "appalled" (to use Isaiah's words) that His own creation turned away from Him to their own devices. And because He is a loving God....a loving Father...he can't just sit back and watch us head toward destruction. He gets involved.

Because he has given us the gift of freedom of choice, we know there are consequences to sin. But, the good news is...that out of His great love, he even gives an answer to our own failings and shame.

Romans 6:23 says: *"the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

In Isaiah 59:20 "The Redeemer will come to Zion to those in Jacob who repent of their sins." That's how God rolled up His sleeves. He came as a redeemer. He "bought us back" from the slavery of our own sins and rebellion against God and set us free in Christ.

We still struggle today to try life on our own terms...To do it our way.

Our culture is saturated with this mindset. For years, Burger King's slogan was: "Have it your way." Many of us are really caught up in that, but God has come to redeem us...to tell us there is a better way.

This new way required sacrifice on His part. It required pain, and loss and suffering from our God in order to salvage our lives. But He gave His life for us....He rolled up His sleeves and got involved in our lives and got dirty and bloody... and He did all this because He loved us.

## **Conclusion:**

Outline from: J. Strite  
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Paul wrote to Titus: *"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another."* - Titus 3:3

## **Isaiah 59:9-17 New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> So justice is far from us,  
and righteousness does not reach us.  
We look for light, but all is darkness;  
for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.

<sup>10</sup> Like the blind we grope along the wall,  
feeling our way like people without eyes.  
At midday we stumble as if it were twilight;  
among the strong, we are like the dead.

<sup>11</sup> We all growl like bears;  
we moan mournfully like doves.  
We look for justice, but find none;  
for deliverance, but it is far away.

<sup>12</sup> For our offenses are many in your sight,  
and our sins testify against us.  
Our offenses are ever with us,  
and we acknowledge our iniquities:

<sup>13</sup> rebellion and treachery against the Lord,  
turning our backs on our God,  
inciting revolt and oppression,  
uttering lies our hearts have conceived.

<sup>14</sup> So justice is driven back,  
and righteousness stands at a distance;  
truth has stumbled in the streets,  
honesty cannot enter.

<sup>15</sup> Truth is nowhere to be found,  
and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.  
The Lord looked and was displeased  
that there was no justice.

<sup>16</sup> He saw that there was no one,  
he was appalled that there was no one to intervene;  
so his own arm achieved salvation for him,  
and his own righteousness sustained him.

**17** He put on righteousness as his breastplate,  
and the helmet of salvation on his head;  
he put on the garments of vengeance  
and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.