

Kids who watch cartoons know the value of secrets. Almost every superhero is keeping one. Batman, Superman, and Spiderman all keep the secret that they are someone else. By day they're a normal looking everyday person. But when the need arises at a moment's notice they become someone else, someone to save the day.

For a long time the people of God had been waiting for someone who would come and save the day. Not a superhero like from Saturday morning cartoons and comic books. But a secret servant that few knew many details about. It wasn't that people didn't know he existed or that he was coming, they just didn't know exactly who or when.

It's only because we live at a time in history when this secret servant of the Lord has been fully revealed that we can know who he is and what he came to do. And even that God worked faith in our hearts to believe. Mainly because in the early years of his life the secret servant of the Lord acted more like a comic book superhero. He looked humble and weak. He masked his true identity. But it was all leading up to a time when he would pull off the mask and let his true identity be known. Thankfully we live in that time. This morning we go back, to the prophet Isaiah in the first lesson, and investigate prophecy about the secret servant to better understand that he's our servant too. We see...

**The secret servant of the Lord**  
**A polished arrow concealed till the right time**  
**A light shining out salvation to the ends of the earth**

Every superhero has a secret weapon. Batman has his belt with every imaginable tool on it. Superman can fly and is incredibly strong. Spiderman shoots spider webs. These secret weapons are hidden until they're needed. The servant of the Lord was coming, that people were well aware of. But a lot was hidden until it was the right moment. Until then he would be concealed like a superhero keeping their secret ability concealed until the right time to use it.

Nothing was left to chance. God planned to act and only he knew when. **"Listen to me...before I was born the Lord called me...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."** No open shows of power would accompany the servant of the Lord. The opposite would be true. He would be hidden. He would be a polished arrow concealed in the quiver of God. There's only one polished arrow. So there would be only one to come and save humanity when the time was right. None of that meant the servant wouldn't have power. His mouth would be a sharp sword, swinging and striking. The phrase "the pen is mightier than the sword" was first written in 1839, but God knew that 2500 years earlier. The servant of the Lord would use powerful words to have an impact. Remaining largely hidden behind words, the servant would be put to use for God's glory, serving the Lord, coming at just the right time and doing the work of God with his powerful words.

Consider the polished arrow in the quiver of God. He comes for those close and those far away. Jews, close because they were God's chosen nation, and anyone who wasn't a Jew considered far away. This servant would be for both. In that way the servant of the Lord would bring glory to God. God's secret weapon, held till just the right time, coming with power showing his strength through his Word. The right time was Christmas. We were prepared and ready. He came and from infancy obeyed God perfectly. Then this polished arrow was shot, pressed into service. He had a baptism like us. It made him look weak and humble, but that was his human flesh. His true identity remained hidden. When the mask was removed Jesus was true God and true man. The secret servant of the Lord.

What a secret weapon Jesus was. Jesus hit the bullseye on your sinful nature, destroying its grip and hold over you. He struck death down and any threat death might hang on you because of sin. Jesus shot right through your sin by taking it away and forgiving you. Christ spoke his loving and powerful Word and gave you comfort, forgiveness, and hope for eternity. Jesus was the display of God's grace, a grace people could only hope for, but grace that became reality in Christ. A grace at just the right time.

Secret superheroes doesn't mean no one ever knows about them. When a superhero in the movies or comics helps someone that person is forever grateful. When the police need help with a case they call the superhero to the rescue. Always at least one other person knows the true identity of the superhero. Keeping the secret servant of the Lord hidden for a time didn't mean God never intended to reveal him. When he was revealed, it was for the whole world. Like a light that shines out and can't be stopped, that is what Jesus is as the servant of the Lord. He is a light that shines out salvation to the ends of the earth.

Sadly there were times in Jesus' life on earth where the light he tried to shine didn't look like it was getting even to his closest friends much less the ends of the earth. Listen to how the servant of the Lord says it himself in Isaiah, **"I have labored to no purpose; I have spent myself in vain and for nothing."** Jesus expended his strength always, but often received ingratitude and rejection. He proclaimed his message forcefully. He labored, but so often few seemed to actually be saved. His twelve disciples sometimes questioned. The Pharisees and other religious leaders looked for ways to kill him. John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus and saw the Holy Spirit descend on him like a dove, wondered alone in prison if Jesus really was the Savior. Jesus didn't have stadiums full of people; no standing room only for his sermons. It looked like his labor was for nothing.

When the same happens to us it can be demoralizing. Getting bossed around and not getting any credit or praise for doing a good job hurts. We get frustrated and angry when things look like they've happened for no purpose. And when we work hard for God and it results in nothing that hurts even more. Thousands of invitations sent out for Christmas and Easter year after year, but no new members from them. Conversations you've had with friends that only result in hurt feelings and not conversions. VBS for decades and how many members actually came from all that effort? Or the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, the bags we hand out, the booth we put up, the float we work hard to build? Year after year nothing. Attendance is down most weeks it seems. It could leave us all feeling like it was all worthless time wasted.

Jesus never thought it was for nothing though. Listen again to the servant of the Lord, **"I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God."** God used the light Jesus was shining into the world to bring salvation to those it touched. And Jesus went farther and identified with you. He wasn't a sinner, instead living perfectly so he would be your Savior. At his baptism that light came pouring out. From that moment on he was openly the Savior. His light came with his power and defeated sin, death, and Satan. It achieved victory in the face of failure. That light penetrates into the places where we feel defeated at sending out postcard invitations with no results, and the light of Jesus splashes victory over it all. Victory because that gospel you believe works in your heart. That light of Christ works its way past the feeling of failure at attendance numbers, and overcomes doubt and discouragement. The light of Christ is your rescue. It's your safety. It shines on you, leaving you completely confident of your forgiveness and victory in Christ.

The light that shines on you shines past you to the ends of the earth. **"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."** Christ's light continues to shine. The message of Christmas and the realization of the baptism of Christ is that he is a Savior for all. He's a Savior for you, for your neighbor, for your newborn baby, for babies still to be born. You have a Savior of love, love for all, and love for you. Christ Jesus brings a light of compassion, quickness of forgiveness, and a message bringing glory to God to the ends of the earth.

The secret fantasy superheroes of our childhood were cool. They always came exactly when they were needed and could do anything necessary to save the day. But they weren't real. The secret servant of the Lord is. He's a polished arrow deployed at just the right time for you. He won forgiveness for all people. He brings lost sinners into the light of God's grace from all the ends of the earth. He leaves no doubt you're included. That's your secret servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ.