

8/4/24

“HIDDEN PATHS”

Isaiah 42:16

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,

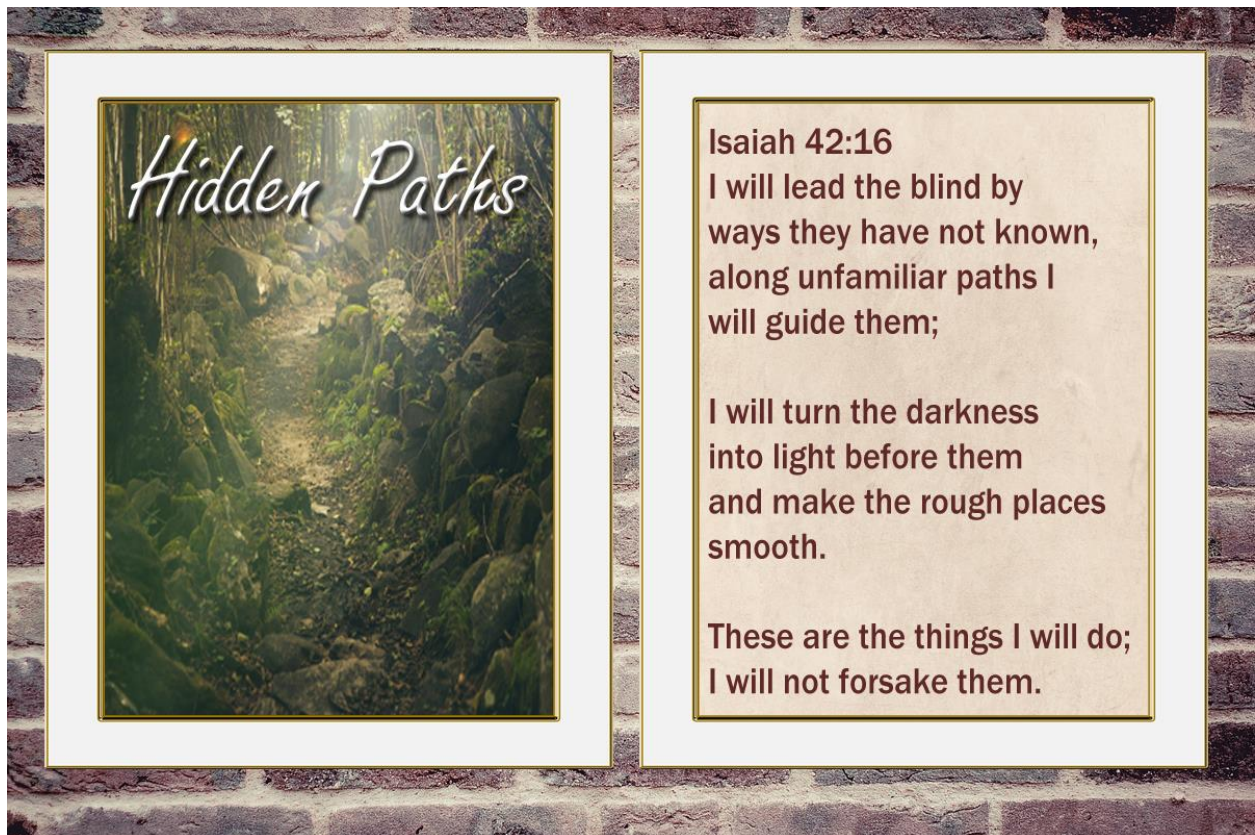
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;

I will turn the darkness into light before them

and make the rough places smooth.

These are the things I will do;

I will not forsake them.



Special Music: “Mystery (Hidden Things)

VOUS Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ukLBYiDBTs>

THE HIDDEN PATH

Mason had pulled into the rest stop to stretch his legs a bit. It had been a long drive from east Texas. It was early evening, and the sun was getting low as he climbed back into his Chevy. Reaching over to the passenger seat, he picked up the letter that had brought him here. It was from a lawyer in Parable, TX, by the name of Body Peckenstock, making Mason aware that his uncle Jesse, his father's brother, had passed away. The letter said that Mason was the closest living relative and had encouraged him to come to Parable to take care of the estate paperwork. There was a will, albeit simple, that left everything to Mason. There couldn't have been much property. As a matter of fact, the estate would probably owe more than it was worth.

The last time that Mason had seen his uncle Jesse was at a family reunion when he was eight. They had never been close, so the whole matter seemed a little peculiar to Mason. He had no desire to deal with his Uncle Jesse's estate, but the letter gave him little choice. Uncle Jesse hadn't named an executor.

Jesse had died a month earlier from a heart attack, and his will specified that he was to be cremated without any formalities. The Graceful Rest Funeral Home had already taken care of the cremation, and the cremains were waiting for Mason in a jar at the funeral home. He had no idea what he was supposed to do with that jar, but he would figure it out when the time came.

He had taken a couple of weeks of his accumulated paid time off, so he didn't feel the need to rush things. At the same time, he knew that he could be a

procrastinator and that he needed to stay focused on why he had come to the Hill Country of Central Texas. Mason looked at the GPS. He was going to have to make some decisions soon. It was clear he wouldn't make it to Parable before nightfall.

He folded the letter and put it back in its envelope, started the car, and continued down road. It wasn't long before he came to the turnoff that would take him to I-35, which led into Austin. If he went that way, he could find a decent hotel and get some rest before continuing on to Parable. But he still had that nagging feeling that he might be procrastinating and since there was still a little daylight, he would keep heading west for a little while. Besides, he had already made a reservation at the Bent Tree Motel in Parable.

Up ahead, Mason saw a large billboard with an arrow pointing south toward Ruskville. The sign had flags and bright lights with a message talking about the County Fair currently in progress. Mason loved fairs. Some of his favorite memories came from the times he and his parents would visit the fair in east Texas. In his mind, Mason considered that it might be a good distraction to take time out to enjoy the fair. Surely his business in Parable could wait for a few days. But Mason realized that this was a just another distraction, and he was only indulging in his desire to avoid facing his responsibilities. There would be plenty of time to visit the fair and maybe even take in the sights in Austin after he finished up with Mr. Peckenstock.

He continued driving knowing that his turn onto the county road leading to Parable couldn't be much further. Thirty minutes turned into an hour and Mason

realized he must have missed the turnoff. He checked the GPS. He must not have been paying attention because the turnoff was almost forty miles back the way he had come. At the next opportunity, he made a U-turn. The sun had set, and it was more difficult to see the road signs. Except, of course, that big sign about the county fair which he was even now approaching once again. How could he have missed the turnoff once again? Pulling over to the side of the road, he stopped and rechecked the GPS. He had indeed missed the turnoff again. No wonder Parable was such a small town! No one could find it!

By this time, Mason was extremely frustrated. Why had the GPS not warned him of the turn? Once again, he made a U-turn back to the west. But this time he paid closer attention to the GPS screen. It was a good thing that there wasn't much traffic, because Mason intentionally kept his speed much lower than the speed limit. Several cars flashed by him, one honking his horn and another flashing his lights, but Mason refused to increase his speed for fear that he would miss his exit once again.

As he approached the area where the map showed he should turn, Mason slowed down even more. But the road to Parable wasn't where the screen said it was supposed to be. He continued for another couple of miles and had just decided to give up and head back to Rusksville to spend the night. Then he saw it. To the left was a small, two-lane tar road headed south. There was also a small rusty sign that had once been painted with reflective paint, now dulled and almost invisible in the night. It said, "Parable, TX" with an arrow pointing down the dark road. Unfortunately, there was no turn across the median, so Mason had to drive

another mile before he could turn around and come back. It seemed to Mason that Parable, TX had no desire to be found.

Although somewhat annoyed, Mason was relieved that he had found the road and was able to make his way to Parable. He would spend the night at the Bent Tree and go to see Mr. Peckenstock in the morning to get his uncle's estate settled. After that, he would spend a little time in town to try and understand why his uncle had chosen to live out his life in such a dismal, out-of-the-way, sleepy little burrow hidden in the back woods of the Hill Country. Maybe Parable was a hidden gem and possibly the best place to get some rest on his vacation. He would try to keep an open mind.

**I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth.
These are the things I will do;
I will not forsake them.**

How powerful this scripture from Isaiah is. **“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them.”** I’ve known several individuals in my lifetime who have been visually impaired. I am amazed at how well they navigate the world. There are times when I struggle with getting around and I have all my faculties (at least I think I do). When that happens, I almost envy my non-sighted friends who can manage to get around no matter if is light or dark. They simply don’t need the light to get from here to there. It doesn’t matter if the lights in the building are on or off. It doesn’t matter if it is nighttime or a bright, sunny day.

I, myself, am directionally challenged. Inside or outside, night or day, I can get lost without much effort at all. I can’t tell you the number of times I have taken the wrong exit out of a mall, only to realize that my truck is in a parking lot on the other side of the mall. I have no sense of direction and I need to intentionally pull up a map in my head to go anywhere. And you won’t find me going long distances without turning on the GPS.

A person who is visually impaired and changes the location of where they live or work will intentionally learn where everything is, so that they don't trip over furniture or get turned around going to the Post Office. Me, well, I will trip over furniture in the dark and will take wrong turns even here in town.

So, when God says, "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;" he's speaking directly to me. He's telling me that he doesn't care if I know where I am or not, he is going to direct my steps. He is going to take me down paths I have never explored and in directions I never thought about going.

For most of us, that's a scary way to live. We like to see what is up ahead and even desire to know the path all the way to our destination. We don't like tripping over the furniture. We don't relish getting lost in the dark. We don't like to get lost at all. We feel out of control when we get lost; that we are somehow untethered and subject to the wind and the waves, and the whims of the unknown. It makes us uncomfortable.

We are much more at ease when we have choices or know an area well enough that we understand that eventually, we will find something familiar. If we know that we are somewhere inside a loop that surrounds a city, no matter which direction we go, we will eventually encounter the loop and will be able to find our way our back home.

One of our biggest problems is that we, by nature, are easily distracted. We are susceptible to the signs and directions of the world around us, and we

lose our focus amongst the glitter and the glamour that catches our eyes. We are bombarded by signs that say, “Shop here,” “Eat there,” “Go here,” “See this,” “Experience that.” At the same time we forget we have to pick up the kids at school at 3:30. Our priorities get shifted by the distractions that capture our minds, and we lose our focus on what is important. This is exemplified by Mason in our story today. He had to intentionally refocus his priorities and push the distractions aside, so that he could get to where he needed to be. Not where he wanted to be. But where he needed to be.

As Christians, we do this a lot. Sometimes the process becomes more important than the goal, the work more important than the outcome. We become so focused on programs and in relation to church growth that we forget that our true purpose is supposed to be growing our relationship with God. It’s not that those programs can’t help us achieve our goal, but the distractions should never replace the ultimate goal. If they do, the goal itself becomes empty and we get lost searching blindly for our purpose. And we wonder why God seems to have abandoned us.

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I will not forsake them.**

All too often, we find ourselves stumbling around in the dark wondering why we seem to be failing. We don't grow in our relationship with God. We become tired and restless. We feel ineffective. We keep trying to run faster on the hamster wheel thinking that somehow, if we just do more, if we just pick up the pace, if we will just add some flash, something will change. That God will shower our efforts with blessings. But we are so busy running in circles that we forget that we should be running toward our Creator. A great deal of that can be attributed to the fact that we neglect to include God in our choices. We believe that because we do something for the church, God should bless us for it. But we never bothered to ask God if we should be doing whatever it is. We TELL God that we are going to do it and that we are doing for him, but we never bother to ask him if it truly needs to be done. We just charge ahead full steam in expectation of the blessings we think should be waiting us for our service.

Sometimes, we feel bound by only the choices we see. We often view the choices as both somewhat evil. You've heard the saying about choosing "The lesser of two evils." God never sees things that way. Choosing the lesser of two evils is still choosing evil and our Creator never chooses evil, nor does he want Us to. If all of our options are wrong choices, we need to be searching and praying for another option. God will always provide one. We may have to do some work to find it. We may have to make a U-turn or two and retrace our steps to see what we missed. The sign on the road may not be as visible as we think it should be, and the answer may not be a pleasant one, or as appealing as another option. But it is the choice that God expects of us. It may mean we have to step

out of our comfort zone and into a space that is unfamiliar to us. We may have to deal with some things that we would rather avoid. But God doesn't call us to comfort. God doesn't call us to blend into the status quo.

**I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;**

When we step into blind faith, we can be grateful that God walks beside us, leading us through the obstacles unseen in the darkness.

Concentrate on the verse for a minute.

"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,"

God is doing the leading and we are following. We aren't charging ahead into the darkness without his leadership. God is saying, **"I will lead."** He isn't saying "Jump into the darkness without me and then expect me to keep you from bumping your head or stubbing your toe."

Jesus is a rebel in so many ways. He does things outside of the box. He always has. He stepped into life situations that most of us would never consider. His teachings run against the grain to the point of being unacceptable to many. He runs contrary to societal norms. He leads us into service for his name's sake. Not so we can boast or claim that we did it without him.

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus doesn't say, "You are the way," or "There are other ways." He says, "I am the way." It can be a difficult choice as we try to filter out the glitzy things in the world to be able to follow a beaten, bruised, bloody, emaciated carpenter that was hung on a cross like a common criminal and then buried in a borrowed tomb. In comparison, those paths filled with lights, colors, bold signs, and empty promises can be very appealing to most people. We even have a tendency to think we can slip down one of those paths and enjoy ourselves for a while before we commit to the path pioneered by our Savior. It can be hard to ignore the glitz. The path of our Lord may even seem to some as folly, and undesirable. But the path of Jesus is the only one where truth, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and healing can be found.

How did David put it? We all know the 23rd Psalm. It is ingrained in us. It is written on our hearts. Most of us committed it to memory through the King James version. Say it with me:

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul:

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:

for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Six focused verses that state uncategorically that God is the leader, and we are the followers. While it is true that if we lose our way, and we know in our hearts that our Shepherd will find us and bring us home, it is our own headstrong determination that got us into the situation in the first place. We stopped following and decided we would just try leading ourselves for a while.

That is what I would like us all to be thinking about this week. Are we jumping in without including Jesus in our decision? Are we being distracted by the work, and forgetting the purpose of the work, the ultimate goal of drawing closer to our Creator? Are we tired because we are trying to do things for God rather than letting him do things through us? As the world constantly tries to distract us, are we remaining focused on what God would have us do? Do we understand that God will guide us through the dark turmoil around us as long as we let him to the leading?

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and make the rough places smooth.
These are the things I will do;
I will not forsake them.**

God bless you all.

AMEN

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