

14 “For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. **15** I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. **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. **17** But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame. **18** “Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! **19** Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the Lord? **20** You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen.” **21** It pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.

God Groans, Pants, Gasps

At Planet Fitness, there is an alarm that goes off if you are too noisy when it comes to lifting or re-racking weights. It’s called the lunk alarm. It’s also part of the reason I’d never go to a Planet Fitness because sadly, I’ve been known as a grunter. The last 100 meters of the 400 where the loudest and even today when muscling something into place and trying to lift more than I should I’ve been known to grunt or even shout at inanimate objects. I believe it helps, however grunting, shouting would certainly set off the lunk alarm and label me as a meat head, unwelcome and unwanted at Planet Fitness.

If I would set off the alarm then God certainly would. He too is known as a grunter and a shouter. In fact in the context of our lesson we see him shouting like a warrior charging into battle and in our lesson his shout lays waste to mountains and valleys. But what is God shouting about? Why is he yelling? His people have been walking away from him, closing their eyes, and shutting their ears, while shouting, “I can’t hear you.” Like inanimate objects they refuse to respond and ignore what he says and yet God is still shouting.

At times we too ignore what he has to say, sometimes that is done simply by refusing to hear his word, staying away from church, and other times it’s through willful disobedience to what we already know. But God keeps shouting. Patiently waiting he groans, pants, and gasps with all of his might so that deaf and blind may see and hear his servant.

Isaiah wasn't that servant but he was a servant of the Lord. Isaiah had been given the special task of going to God's people and warning them again. Sadly his job was to pronounce judgment on those who had been ignoring God's Word and his will for their lives. Like children enthralled in their TV show or caught up in a book, your words bounce off of deaf ears. They haven't heard a thing though God sent one prophet after another. So he walked over to the TV and cut the cord. God carried them away from everything they cared about because he wanted their attention.

Israel wasn't listening. They had turned to other gods who are blind and deaf. Isaiah mocks them, *"You cut a tree, part of it you use for fuel for a fire, you warm yourself with it, and even cook food over it, but then you take another portion of the wood and make an idol and bow down before it. You pray to it and say, 'Save me! You are my god!'" (Isaiah 44).* Israel received the consequences of their actions and God called Isaiah to make hearts dull, ears heavy, and eyes blind (Isaiah 6:10). He was to shut ears and eyes so they cannot hear and or see.

Israel is blind, deaf, and dumb for doing such things. They have the Lord with them and they turn away. The reason they are blind is because they have shut their eyes and made themselves like their idols. God asks, *"Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send?"* God's servant is Israel. They were to be God's chosen people a light to the nations but they rejected that and worshipped other gods. They refused to speak up and are about as useful as a deaf messenger who can't receive his message.

Because of their ridiculous behavior the Lord shouts. Verse 13 says he shouts like a warrior charging into battle. Like a man of war he cries out and shouts aloud, showing himself mighty against his foes. But then he waits until he can't contain himself and he cries out 10x louder like a woman in labor. He sets off the lunk alarm and he isn't even in the gym. He's across the street in the hospital giving birth. This shout not only echoes from the mountains it destroys them. His breath, which gives life, in this case takes water away, the very stuff of life. We see his anger and frustration as he groans, pants, and gasps.

The idea behind the Lunk Alarm is they don't want to hear grunts, shouts, groans, and gasps. They don't want anyone intimidated so they set off an alarm. The same can happen in church, if we set alarms to control what we do or don't want to hear. The alarm goes off because you don't like what you've heard so you shut your ears and or go somewhere else. The concern shouldn't be, "Do I like it?" but, "Is this what God has to say to me?" or are we ignoring God and his speaking to us through his servant? I know I have. I've ignored God's Word. I've wanted it to be different but God sends one message after

another, from brothers and sisters, pastors and teachers, to the very conscience that screams at me: sinner.

The purpose of the Lunk Alarm is to shame you by calling you a person of low intelligence, all brawn no brain. If the alarm goes off more than once, you are asked to leave their establishment. I haven't gone to a gym and I don't care to listen to alarms. But the God delights in giving us his word so we won't be put to shame. He gives us his word so we won't leave. Listen to the him. Spend time with him. Hear his voice.

But how often haven't we, covered our ears, closed our eyes? Or even as deaf messengers or blind servants, - how often haven't we refused to learn or ignore what's happening right in front of us? For us to think that it's not such a big deal and ignore portions or parts of scripture isn't a small thing. It always is a big deal when we don't listen. God expresses his outrage at the unfaithfulness of his people who still find excuses for their rebellion and sin.

God has a very specific warning against those who would go back to a life of blindness, a life in Babylon. *But those who trust in idols, who say to images, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back in utter shame.* Staying with those gods brings utter shame. Sometimes those gods are ourselves. If the idolaters don't give up their idols. If they insist on staying in Babylon they will be put to shame.

Open your eyes and see. Listen. But how ironic that God is shouting at the deaf and the blind. They can't hear. They can't see. But once again he restores their sight. He renews his promise to deliver them. He leads the blind out on a path they do not know.

Isaiah states that our warrior shouting as he makes his way into battle is the same God who shouts as he gives birth. He is tender and tough. Mighty and merciful. He leads and suffers, brings out of captivity from the gods of Babylon. When the woman cries out in labor Babylon is destroyed and yet from this destruction life is born. God brings life to his people who have tried his patience, a patience well beyond normal endurance. God loses his temper with those whom he loves when they ignore his promise and his plan for their lives.

Yet he does not forsake them. He delivers them. He calls to them. He leads them out of darkness into his wonderful light. God steps in the place of a worthless servant both blind and deaf and calls out to all people. There are two servants here. Israel is the worthless servant sent away into exile Then there is the Servant of the Lord who stands in the place of the blind and deaf. Jesus came as that servant of the Lord. Jesus fulfills the

prophecies of Isaiah. Jesus identifies himself with this servant, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

That servant would go on to suffer for the worthless servant. He would groan in pain. Pant and gasp for air as his lungs filled with fluid. He would be crushed by the shout that destroys mountains but Jesus brought sight to the blind. And hearing to the deaf. On the cross he gave life to the dead in sin. This work pleased *the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.*

God’s Word is great and glorious even when he whispers through his word. God works faith to believe that even though all of us have tried the patience of an almighty and merciful God, even though all of us often act as inanimate objects who haven’t heard God’s Word or responded to it, God still deals with us generously. You’d think God would stop talking and remove his Word from us. Instead he continues to send people to speak on his behalf and pronounce, “I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the father, son, and holy Spirit.” God delights to bring you his word. He loves bringing forgiveness to you.

Because of the Servant of the Lord, the only faithful servant I can say that. He took up the shame of the lunk alarm when we dropped the weights. He was labeled a sinner in our place and kicked out of the world. He received what we deserve. Don’t neglect the hearing of his word. Listen to him. Open your eyes and read it for yourself and then don’t place your opinion on the same level as that of God’s Word.

I may be a grunter and I may still yell at inanimate objects because I think it helps. However, I won’t be using Planet Fitness’ Judgment Free zone any time soon but I won’t hold it against you if you do. Even though God is a grunter, a shouter, and one who groans for his creation. It’s a labor of love. God’s groans in the delivery room like a woman in labor so that all may see and hear his son, our Savior.