

“The Glory of the Savior Servant”

Isaiah 49:1-12

Series: *The Glory of Christmas*

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Isaiah 49.

As we come back to the book of Isaiah this morning, we do so with the goal of seeing the unrivaled glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And we do that with the awareness of what we just sang about – that the joy of Bethlehem’s manger is mixed with the grief of Golgotha’s cross. This Savior who came was given flesh and blood so that he might offer it as a sacrifice for the redemption of our souls. And this rejection by men and this saving work of Jesus is clearly prophesied by Isaiah some 700 years before his birth. In particular, it is the second half of Isaiah’s book that most clearly proclaims the purpose and plan of this coming servant of the Lord.

You’ll remember from last week that Isaiah is like a mini-Bible in that the first 39 chapters are filled with the prophecy of coming judgment for the wicked. There are prophecies of this coming Savior, but they are sprinkled like salt on the bitter herbs of judgment. But the last 27 chapters – chapters 40-66 – have the focus of this coming salvation through the promised one – the Christ – the Messiah. These 27 chapters break down further into equal sections of 9 chapters each. And at the end of each 9-chapter section the same warning is given. The last verse of the first section – Isaiah 48:22 says – “There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.” The last verse of the second section – Isaiah 57:21 says – “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.” And the last verse of the last section, which is also then the last verse of the entire book amplifies the warning with these explicit words – Isaiah 66:24 – “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

That is the promised darkness of eternal judgment for the wicked. And this truth of coming judgment is like the black cloth at the jewelry store that they take out to display the diamonds on. The dark background serves to contrast and illuminate the beauty of the diamonds on display. The diamond of Isaiah’s prophecy is this chosen servant of God who will come and who will make peace with God possible. Isaiah has been called the Evangelical prophet, or maybe better, the Gospel prophet. His name means “Yahweh is salvation” and that is the theme of his book. The rhythm of these three 9-chapter sections is pointing us to this coming Deliverer in the context of the desperate need for deliverance.

And this deliverer is a glorious one! He is one of unparalleled exaltation and magnificence. And this glory is described for us most clearly in these 4 servant songs of Isaiah’s prophecy. In this second song in chapter 49 we see two entities talking. The song starts out with the servant talking to the nations of the world. And then the Lord speaks to the servant in verse 3, and the servant answers in verse 4. Then in verses 5-12 we have 3 different statements from Yahweh to

Yahweh's servant which spell out for us the great glory of this Servant. Let's read starting in verse 1.

Against the backdrop of the wicked having no peace with God, the servant speaks. And he tells the nations to listen up and tune in. He has a message of hope and comfort for them. They are not without a way to be made right with God. There is a way, and that way is through Him, the servant of Yahweh. He is the Savior Servant. Last week, in the first servant song, we saw the glory of the Spirit-filled servant. We saw his exalted position and his exalted person and his exalted purpose. In this second servant song we see the glory of the Savior Servant. He is the hope of the Jews and of the nations, and he tells them to listen up and tune in. The glory of this Savior Servant is seen first in his unique calling in verses 1-4.

I. His Unique Calling – vs. 1-4

- a. There is none greater than this servant called by God for His saving purposes. At the end of verse 1 we have this prophetic statement which is easily missed. It is easy to just roll over that line – The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. But as S. Lewis Johnson points out, there is a significant prophecy couched in this text. One of the arguments of the Orthodox Jews against the claims of Christians that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah promised in the Old Testament is that his name is nowhere spoken in any prophetic text. Did you know that? Jesus' name doesn't appear anywhere in the Old Testament as the one specifically named as the coming Messiah. His many other names are in this very book – Immanuel, Prince of peace, Mighty God, Son of God and Son of Man – but the personal name, Jesus, is not found in Old Testament prophecy. The first time we hear what the personal, human name of this Messiah is going to be is when the angel appears to Mary in Luke 1 and tells her that she is going to conceive a child by the power of the Holy Spirit and she is to name him Jesus – why? – because he will save his people from their sins. Then in Matthew 1, the angel appears to Joseph not much after that Luke 1 experience and tells him that Mary is with child by the power of the Holy Spirit and Joseph is to take Mary as his wife and name the child Jesus.
- b. So, do you see the prophecy from Isaiah 49:1 being fulfilled here? Why was Jesus never named in the Old Testament? Because Isaiah 49:1 said that he would be named from the body of his mother. When he was in the womb, the Lord would call him by his name. And so He did! He has a unique calling – a glorious name – Jesus – Savior!
- c. Not only was his calling unique in that he would be set apart from his mother's womb by name, but his calling was also accompanied by a careful equipping. In verse 2 the Lord equips him with a mouth like a sharp sword, and then later in the verse we are told he is made into a polished, or sharpened, arrow. In other words, this servant is weaponized for the warfare that he is coming into the world to bring. His mouth being like a sharp sword is indicating that with His mere words he will bring about the completely righteous and authoritative judgment against his enemies. In chapter 11 and verse 4 it was prophesied that this servant would strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the

breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. He is adequately and uniquely equipped for the warfare he is bringing.

- d. But notice the parallelism of verse 2. So, his mouth being a sharp sword is parallel to him being a polished arrow – both weapons of warfare. But the next phrase is parallel to the last one – in the shadow of his hand he hid me, and, in his quiver he hid me away. So, he is outfitted for war, but he is hidden away and stored for the appropriate time. In other words, He is kept from view until he is needed. How does Galatians 4 say it? “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”
- e. He was stored away in God’s quiver until the fullness of time had come, and then he was pulled forth and sent straight for the target. And this, as verse 3 says is glorifying to the Lord whose servant He is. Notice that verse 3 refers to the servant as Israel here, but that is not because he is now referring to national Israel. But rather, he is pointing to the unique relationship of this servant to the nation of Israel. He is out of the Jewish people, and He will be the only one who can save them from themselves. In that sense He is the truest Son of Abraham to ever live. He is perfectly what Israel as God’s Chosen people never was or could be. And as the perfect Jew he was God’s slave to work according to Yahweh’s perfect will this plan for redemption. This is glorifying to God!
- f. But that great glory to God is seemingly countered in verse 4 with some discouraged statements by the servant. This unique calling is accompanied by a deep and heavy disappointment. And that disappointment is that the servant will feel as though he has labored in vain. He was sent to accomplish a great salvation for God’s people and was launched like a polished arrow by God to strike a direct hit in this battle of Righteousness versus evil. And yet, he is discouraged and disheartened by the results. This is so very instructive for us. There is great glory here, but at first glance it looks like a total failure. Just think of the end of Jesus’ life. Isn’t this why so many have never crossed the line from unbelief to belief? They see this great prophet who spoke authoritatively and healed prolifically, but then who died as a seeming failure. It was so disheartening and disappointing that even his own disciples couldn’t figure out what had gone wrong.
- g. But actually, the only failure here was on the part of the Jews. They failed to recognize their true Messiah. They failed to submit to the kind of righteous King this Jesus of Nazareth was going to be. And so they denied his claims and created a way to put him to death in them cruelest of ways. From a human perspective there has been no greater disappointment in God’s work than that moment when God’s chosen people rejected God’s chosen servant. This is why Jesus, just days before dying on the Cross, is seen weeping over Jerusalem and her unbelief. That is the expression in the life of Jesus of this text in Isaiah 49.
- h. But this servant entrusted himself to the Lord. He is deemed a failure and his work is considered vain by human standards. He died alone and abandoned. His Kingdom must not have been too strong because he was easily overthrown by a Roman governor and nailed to a Roman cross as the vilest of criminals would be.

But the servant knows that his case will not be tried in the court of human opinions. His case will be decided by the High King of Heaven. He will determine if the servant's work was right or not. He will divvy out the rewards, or better, the wages, for that work. And so, the servant leaves it with the Lord. And this is exactly how Peter describes our Lord some 750 years later in 1 Peter 2:23 – “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

- i. In other words, this uniquely called servant – the Lord Jesus himself – could stay faithful to his task even though in the moment it seemed completely vain and useless, simply because he knew that it was right and he would give account to His Father in Heaven as the righteous Judge. He could faithfully walk through disappointment and discouragement in the Gospel ministry the likes of which you and I have never seen. And as this one uniquely called, he gives himself entirely to the one who has called. He is God's, completely and wholly – both in his mission and in his validation of that mission.
2. **His Universal Commission – vs. 5-6**
- a. Next, we see his glory in his universal commission in verses 5-6. He has been uniquely called and this calling has sent him on a mission, like an arrow, to defeat evil and rescue God's people. But this mission is disheartening and discouraging and appears to be vain at first sight. But now the Lord speaks to His servant in verses 5-6 and affirms this mission. He tells him that he has been formed from his mother's womb to bring Jacob back to the Lord and to re-gather Israel to him. That is the main thrust of his mission. But then verse 6 adds a layer of purpose to the servant's mission. The Lord says to his servant that his work will be too great and too magnificent to be kept for the Jewish people only. It is too light a thing, he says in verse 6, to save only Israel. It is too trivial in comparison to the magnitude of the Servant's work. So, the Lord will make the servant to be a light to the nations as well so that this salvation he is bringing can be taken to the end of the earth.
 - b. Now we know why the servant's words at the beginning of this passage were calling the peoples from afar to pay attention and to listen up. This interaction between the Lord and his servant will bring them good news. There is Gospel here in this verse. And it is not as though this is the only place we see this universal commission of the Gospel in the Scriptures. When you look closer you see this thread of God's plan to use His chosen people to be a light to the nations and to bring them to be true worshipers of Jehovah God. But, in their failure to do that, one of them would not fail. In fact, he would so succeed that his salvation could not be kept just for his people. It had to expand to farther shores and distant lands and far away peoples. And this is what we see in the New Testament too. Jesus' commission to his apostles was to take his gospel to the whole world. The book of Acts is the account of that very thing taking place. In fact, in Acts 1:8 this phrase, to the end of the earth is quoted as Jesus commissions his apostles to be his witnesses. And then in Acts 13:47 Paul quotes this verse to validate his and Barnabas' mission to the Gentiles.

- c. Beloved, the light of the gospel is too bright to keep it in one place for one people. The light is so bright that it must spread to the whole world and it must call forth people from every tribe, tongue, language, and people group to bring eternal salvation to them. How encouraging this thought must have been to the disheartened servant! How this verse must have been running through Jesus' mind even as he wept over Jerusalem and her unbelief – knowing that their rejection would lead to the salvation of many more. What a glorious servant!
3. **His Ultimate Confirmation – vs. 7**
- a. Then in verse 7 we see his glory all the more in his ultimate confirmation. The Lord speaks again to his servant and tells him of his final exaltation that will eventually come. But before we get to that, consider the context of this promise. The Lord is referenced as the Redeemer of Israel and the Holy One of Israel, which are his credentials to be able to say what he will to the servant. And the servant needs him to say this to him because the servant will be one who is deeply despised and abhorred by the nation. He will be the slave of rulers. To be deeply despised is to be assigned little worth or value. It is to show contempt to someone or something by undervaluing its worth. It's like a child who has no concept of the value of a \$100 bill and rips it into shreds because they like the sound of paper tearing. But it is worse than that here with the servant. It is more like our society's general view of life in the womb. Planned Parenthood has sold the bill of goods that this is nothing more than a clump of cells that can be discarded like a day-old newspaper. It is a complete undervaluing of someone's inherent worth which then leads to destructive and wicked actions. And this is most certainly what happened with Jesus. He was the God in the flesh, but he was called a liar in cohort with the Devil himself. He was proclaimed to be a fraud and a fake. His words were twisted, and his authority was completely denied, and he was brought up on charges of treason against the Emperor.
 - b. Not only that, but he was also to be one abhorred by the nation. And this nation is the nation to which he was specifically sent – the nation of the Jews. To be abhorred means to be thought of in the worst possible terms – to be considered a complete abomination. It is the worst of the worst. It is a word reserved for the worst kind of sins – like idolatry and prostitution – those were abhorrent sins. Well, this servant would be abhorred by the nation. He would be despised and rejected of men. He would be considered the worst of the worst. He would be called a blasphemer and an infidel. He would be considered worse than a known murderer and insurrectionist – Barabbas himself. Jesus was thought to be more abhorrent. Crucify Him! Crucify Him! They yelled.
 - c. He would be flogged with the worst type of human punishment imaginable – leaving him barely alive to then make the terribly shameful trek through the city to be executed outside the walls on the hill of death. He would be lifted up on that execution stake in between two known and despised criminals worthy of this kind of torture. The sight of him would be so ghastly that he hardly looked like a man. People would pass by wagging their heads in shame and disgrace at this one who said he was the Son of God in the flesh. Now he hangs on a Roman

cross gasping for air, barely alive. He would truly be considered the worst of the worst – abhorred by the nation.

- d. And that has not ended. The Orthodox Jews to this day consider Jesus of Nazareth to be the most influential and therefore the most wicked of the false messiahs. Their Hebrew word for him calls him a bastard child, and their leaders remain convinced that he could not be the Messiah because he died on a Roman cross. In that death he was the slave of the rulers. He was subservient to the Jewish leaders who drug him before the Roman rulers. He was condemned by Pilate as an expression of the official rejection of all.
 - e. But, and here is the glorious good news for the servant, and for all who are his – Kings shall see and arise, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you. This is the promise of the Lord to this despised and abhorred servant. He will be ultimately valued and exalted. Though despised by Kings and nations, he will finally and completely be lifted high above them all. This is the Philippians 2 idea. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even a cross kind of death. But he will be exalted because he has the name which shall be above every name, listen – so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
 - f. This is not the mere subjection of all of Christ’s enemies under his feet. It is that, but it is more. It is the ultimate revelation to the nations, and in particular, to the Jewish nation, that this Jesus whom they crucified is indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world. This is why Revelation 1 tells us that when he comes again, those who pierced him, meaning the Jews, and every tribe on earth, will wail on account of him. It will finally click that the one masked behind frail humanity was indeed the fullness of time redeemer, the one sent from God, even God himself in the flesh. And after the Judgment of the wicked is complete and the New Heavens and the New Earth are established and the New Jerusalem comes down to rest upon the Earth – we are told in Revelation 21:26 that they will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. This one who had been so despised will be the one so eternally honored by Kings and princes and nations! This servant who was confirmed by the Father and the Spirit and the Son as the one sent from God, will one day be confirmed by the nations as who He really is. What a glorious servant!
- 4. His Undeterred Consummation – vs. 8-12**
- a. And this brings us to the undeterred consummation of verses 8-12. Though the nations of the world are now involved in this saving plan of God this does not negate the promises of God to His people, the nation of Israel. The last statement from Yahweh to his servant is found in verses 8-12 and it is a statement of consummation. What has been promised by God to the nation through the servant will be accomplished. He will be a covenant to the Jews. He will establish them in the New Covenant, of which we as Gentiles partake in the glorious and eternal blessings, but this New Covenant will be based upon the servant’s

sacrifice and it will guarantee the restoration of the Jews to the fullness of God's promises to them. Though they are scattered around the globe, these verses detail the regathering of God's people to God's land in fulfillment of God's promise. Remember that Isaiah is writing just before the exile to Babylon, so he is writing to be read by the Jews in their exile. They will be prisoners in a dark place. But the servant will not leave them there. The Lord, through the servant will bring them back and will lead them on this great pilgrimage home. They will not hunger or thirst. They will be completely supplied, and the way home will be made straight for them. This consummation will prove the faithfulness of God to His chosen people, and it will find its full completion in the Eternal Kingdom where all of God's people, from every nation, will be gathered around His throne – satisfied completely in Him.

5. His Unequaled Comfort – vs. 13

- a. These promises to the servant from the Lord display for us the great glory of this entirely unique one. There is none greater, and none like Him. And so, just like we saw after the first servant song in chapter 42, this song is followed by a statement of exuberant praise. In verse 13 we see the command for all of God's creation to join in the song of praise. This universal acclaim should come to this servant because he has brought unequaled comfort. Through the servant the Lord has comforted his people and has compassion on the afflicted. In light of the unique calling of the servant, and his universal commission, ultimate confirmation, and undeterred consummation – he is able to bring unequaled comfort to his people. That is the point of this prophecy – to comfort God's people who know the constant burden of living in a sin-cursed world. We can sing for joy because we have the glorious good news of gospel hope found in this glorious servant – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: So friend, where are you at with this glorious servant of the Lord? Is he rejected and abhorred by you still? Do you despise him and disbelieve him, like so many others? See from this text that your unbelief will not last forever. One day you will know the truth, but it might be too late. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today. See in Him your only hope for eternal comfort, for there is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord. Your only hope for peace is found in Christ.

Brother or sister, are you disheartened in the work of the Lord? See in this servant of the Lord the greatest disappointment of the lack of immediate results ever known. And see the response of the servant to entrust himself completely to him who judges justly. Do the same, beloved. Work hard and be faithful and leave it with the Lord. Are you downtrodden and afflicted? Look to this uniquely called servant and find in him unequaled comfort! Let's pray.

Lord's Table:

We will end our time together this morning in the most appropriate way – by gathering around the Lord's Table. Having considered the unique glory of Christ from Isaiah's prophecy we will now come to this table of remembrance.