

PAY IT FORWARD Sunday School- January 23, 2011

Unifying Topic: THE SERVANT'S MISSION IN THE WORLD

Lesson Text

I. **Christ: God's Servant (Isaiah 49:1-3)**

II. **A Light To The Gentiles (Isaiah 49:4-6)**

The Main Thought: And he said, it is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6,KJV).

Unifying Principle: People who are grateful for the benefits they receive like to reciprocate by serving others. How are people to respond to receiving abundance? God reminds Israel of the gifts they received from Him and charges them to bring hope to the nations.

Lesson Aim: To help students understand that God wants salvation for all people.

Life Aim: To teach how God chose a Suffering Servant to bring salvation to all people throughout the earth. The Lord prepares His servants for their service to others and rewards them for their faithfulness.

49:1 Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

49:2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

49:3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

49:4 Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.

49:5 And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

49:6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

HISTORY:

One of the main overall themes of the last few chapters of Isaiah has been the prophecy of the coming defeat of Babylon and the return of the Jewish captives back to Israel. This chapter continues with the same focus. God again makes it clear that Cyrus is "His man" and that it is by God's power that Cyrus will be able to destroy Babylon. God reminds the people yet again that no idol foretold the coming of Cyrus or foretold the destruction of Babylon. Because God's prophecies always come true, this is a case for God's divinity. Here the Jews are exhorted to leave Babylon behind and return home.

Now why did the Jews need to be exhorted to leave Babylon? Surely they would want to escape their captors? You must remember that the Jews had been living in Babylon for 70 years now - this is not the same generation that had been taken into captivity. These are the children and grandchildren. Some of the Jews are quite wealthy and well off now - why would they want to return to dirty, unsophisticated Jerusalem and start over? They like the luxuries and privileges of Babylon, and will probably like it even more under the governing of the Persians. Once again God is reminding the Jews of how He took care of them in the past, during the Exodus, when they were wandering in the desert with no water. The last thing He leaves them with this; "*you can have peace*", God says, "*if you obey Me.*"

LESSON:

Isaiah 49:1-3 Christ: God's Servant

49:1 In the previous chapter we saw that God was only speaking to the Jews, particularly to the Jews in exile. Now the audience has changed and what the Lord is saying through Isaiah is for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. "Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations:" The Servant Himself speaks, testifying how the Lord had called Him and prepared Him for His task. In this section of Isaiah's prophecy, the Servant is personalized and identified as the One whom the Lord has called **from the womb** and the One whom He has called by **name**. This is none other than the virgin-born Immanuel Himself! ¹Jesus' name and office was given to Him before He was even born, first to His mother Mary, Read Luke 1:31-33; then later to his stepfather Joseph, Read Matthew 1:20-21. How that must have bewildered His parents to be told by God that Jesus was to "*save his people from their sin!*"

49:2 His mouth is described **like a sharp sword**, a description often used of Christ, but never of Israel. The Lord hid

¹ http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1040598/bible_study_lesson_for_isaiah_4916_pg2.html?cat=37

His servant indicating the Lord's care and protection. We have two general images here of the Servant: The first image of a weapon: like a sharp sword. The author of Hebrews refers to the Word of God being like a sword, Read Hebrews 4:12-13. The words of Jesus pierce the hearts of people as no other words can, deep into the soul, where it cannot be hard to forget them. This image of a sword coming out of the Lord's mouth is repeated five times in revelation, Read Revelation 1:16. The second image is that the Servant will be hidden: This indicates that the Servant will be protected from His enemies (as we just saw Jesus was) and/or not revealed until the proper time. Jesus' true purpose and calling was hidden even from His disciples, from everyone, really, until after the resurrection. Once His true purpose was revealed, then the arrow of His words would be even more effective, and would no longer rest unused in the quiver.

49:3 Here we confirm that it is the Servant of the Lord who is speaking. Christ takes the place of Israel as the true servant of God. Though He is called **my servant, O Israel**, it is clear that the national title is used as a designation for the Messiah who shall come forth from that nation. A note: ²Why is the Servant here called Israel? This cannot refer to the nation because the Servant is to draw that nation back to God. We should not read "Israel" here as literally Israel (that is the nation), but rather The Messiah is called Israel because He fulfills what Israel should have done; the Servant will succeed where the Jews failed. In His person and work He exemplifies the nation. The Servant will be the instrument in how God will be glorified, Read John 17:1-5. In verse 4 of that chapter tells us how Jesus brought glory to God, "*by completing the work you gave me to do.*"

Isaiah 49:4-6 A Light To The Gentiles

49:4 This verse shows the humanity of the Servant, that He would despair and feel that all His work and sacrificing was in vain. He would face strong opposition and apparent failure. The Servant would not be recognized for who He was and for what He was doing and He would feel despondent because of it, Read Matthew 23:37-39, 26:36-39. Here in the Garden of Gethsemane we see Jesus deeply sorrowing and asking the Father whether He must indeed go through the pain of death, but ultimately accepting that He must do the will of His Father. Ultimately, The Servant knew He would be glorified by the Father for what He would do, in being obedient unto death; He willingly left the results in the Father's hands.

49:5 The Servant has a two-fold mission from the Lord **who formed** (*yotseriy, meaning to fashion or ordain*) Him **from the womb** to be His Servant. That mission is **to bring Jacob again to Him** and to restore the preserved of Israel. This first aspect of His assignment is to the House of Israel and to the believing remnant of Israel in particular. As Christians we often forget that Christianity came out of Judaism. Jesus was a Jew. His first 12 apostles were Jews. The original church was a church of Jews. When Peter preaches his first sermon at Pentecost, he preaches to Jews, Read Acts 2:1-12, 36-41. Though the Servant would be rejected by the nation, yet He would be honored by God. He would not only approve His character and work, but God would be His strength.

49:6 **This is a light (small) thing for You to be My Servant...** But God goes on to say it is not just enough for the Jews to come back in right relationship, He loves the Gentiles as well. In addition, The Messiah is also commissioned to be a **light to the Gentiles**. The Messiah shall be glorified in the conversion of the Gentiles and God will use His chosen people to bless all the nations of the earth. Why all this? So that **My salvation may reach to the end of the earth**. The Messiah would not simply *bring* salvation; He would be . . . salvation to the ends of the earth.

SUMMARY:

This is a prophecy of Christ—Jehovah's Servant! The Servant of the Lord takes center stage. In the first half of this Servant Song, Isaiah 49:1-6, we see the Servant in dialogue with the Lord. The Servant speaks (verses 1 and 2); the Lord responds (verse 3); the Servant speaks again (verse 4); the Lord responds again (verses 5 and 6). The Servant says, "*Listen to me...*" The Father says of Jesus, "*This is my beloved Son, listen to him!*" (Mark 9:7). The Servant addresses the "islands," the "peoples from afar." He's speaking not to Israel but to the Gentile nations. He's speaking about his work. The Servant is called and named from the womb. The angel told Mary, "*And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus*" (Luke 1:31). The Servant's mouth is like a sharp sword, as He fights God's war with His word. His word is effective, accurate, particularly when aimed at distant targets. The Lord has "*made*" Him this way, and he made Him this way while concealing Him "*in the shadow of His hand*" and while hiding Him "*in His quiver.*" The Lord prepares the Servant for His task, and that preparation involves intimacy with Him. Intimacy with the Lord sharpens the sword and makes the arrow a select one. The Apostle John, speaking of Jesus, says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14).

² <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20070529164712AADWzIP>

The best thing we can do to prepare for what God has for us next is to draw close to Him through the Word and prayer. In this way he sharpens and polishes us. He doesn't seem to be in any hurry. Preparation takes time. It may feel that nothing much is happening in your life right now, that you're not really being used by God. Perhaps you've moved forward in certain ways, but doors have closed. Perhaps the timing is wrong. Perhaps now is the time for preparation, when you need to be drawing close to Him. Perhaps the Lord is sharpening and polishing you.

The Servant announces what the Lord has revealed to Him concerning His identity: "And He said to me, '*You are my Servant, Israel, in whom I will show my glory.*'" The Lord wanted to display His glory—the awesomeness of His Being—in Israel. The symbol of this desire was the temple in Jerusalem, where the Lord's glory was manifested. ³So when the Lord identifies His Servant as Israel here; He's identifying one who embodies His design for Israel.

The Servant has heard the Lord commission Him, but after embarking on His mission, He felt that he had failed. *The first call*: to bring back Jacob and gather Israel, has apparently not worked well. At some point, He became disheartened because Israel was rejecting His words. He felt as if He poured Himself out to no effect. There are certainly times when we may find ourselves in similar situations. The second half of verse 4 says, "*Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord.*" This is the affirmation of faith. It may look like God has abandoned His servant. It may look like there is no way out. It may look like the story has come to an end. But the servant makes a leap of faith. He decides that the promises of God are more important than His current circumstances. He decides to trust God, even when it looks like He doesn't have any reason to trust God. Yet, He turns to the Lord and renews His confidence in Him. Israel was supposed to be ruling over the nations, but instead the nations were ruling over her. Therefore, The Messiah will be used to restore the "*preserved*" ones of Israel—those who had been preserved by the Lord for this very purpose.

In the last two verses of our lesson God speaks. And He reaffirms His relationship with His servant. God is the one who formed His servant in the womb – He has loved Him before He even entered the world. God has called His servant to be a part of the work that He is doing, and God will be His strength as He carries out that work. None of this has changed. But now God gives an even more difficult task: to serve as a light to the Gentiles. The Word of God must now extend beyond Israel to all peoples to the end of the earth. The Servant will be the one chosen to proclaim that message. The Servant is confident in the wisdom and power of the Lord where Israel was not. He trusts Himself to the Lord. He expects the Lord to vindicate Him.

⁴The expression "*pay it forward*" is used to describe the concept of asking that a good turn be repaid by having it done to others instead. On October 26, 2006 Oprah gave her audience a challenge to "*Pay it Forward*", giving 300 audience guests \$1,000 USD on a debit card and a camcorder to record the acts of kindness they did. The rules of the challenge were very specific; the money had to be spent within one week and could only be used to help charitable organizations or an individual person but not a relative.

What Jesus did on the cross can never be repaid, can never be reciprocated, not even duplicated! There is a song with the lyrics: "*I'll never know how much it cost to see my sins upon that cross.*" You see, there is only "One Messiah" who could do such a thing! There was only "One way" He did it!

However, He left other instructions that we can follow through kindness. There are many things that we've done in our lifetime to help someone else and it took off in a domino affect. The motto in the Naomi Circle at my church is "*Each one reach one.*" One such deed that would affect many would be the spreading of the gospel that would save many souls. You could never repay that one for the seed of salvation. Just one spark to every member of your family and extended families thereafter, would be that "*pay it forward*" affect!

The Servant's mission in the world was to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel. His work extended to be a light to the Gentiles. Jesus paid the ultimate price no one could ever repay.

APPLICATION:

Our mission to the world is to tell what Jesus had done for all of us and live that life before others!

³ <http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/10566/Is49-1-6.html>

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pay_it_forward