

# The Servant of the Lord is Called 1) To Bring Salvation to All

Isaiah 49:1-7 • 2021-01-10 • Epiphany 1



The head of an international company worth billions of dollars wrapped up an important meeting. The upcoming project and marketing campaign were going to be their biggest ever. Jobs, lives, and billions of dollars were at stake. The head of the company selected the people who would carry out the project. They walked out of the meeting, proud, but feeling a heavy weight placed upon their shoulders—as if the weight of the world were hanging upon them. They had to get it right. If you've ever been to an important meeting in which an important task was assigned you can probably relate. Today we begin a series for the season of Epiphany: "The Servant of the Lord is Called." Are you ready to serve the Lord? He calls his servant to carry out a tremendous task. His servant is to bring him glory to the ends of the earth.

Though it wasn't in the office of a multibillion-dollar company it was an important meeting when the young nation of Israel received its task. God himself told Moses that people were to enter an agreement with him. They were called to be his special people and would need to keep all his laws. "*You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" (Ex 19) With this task before them they all responded: "We will do everything the Lord has said." Those are the words that distantly echo in the background as the speaker in Isaiah 49 states his assignment: *The Lord said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."* The goal: be the perfect servant of the Lord to bring him glory.

Israel, however, clearly wasn't up to the task. Let's walk through the book of Isaiah for a moment. God's said through Isaiah: "*I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. Israel does not know; my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt!*" (Is 1:2-4) They were to carry the Word of the Lord before the world and bring God glory. But their words were not always to his glory. They were to live under God's protection and care. But they often strayed from his loving arms. They were to be ready and willing to carry out the Lord's work. But they were more often unprepared and unwilling to serve.

Many looked at the task before them and said, "no thanks." Instead of displaying the Lord's splendor they displayed their contempt for the Lord. Read through the Old Testament and be the judge: Were they for the display of the Lord's splendor? Or were they not for the display of disdain for the Lord? It started with the golden calf and it continued on into Isaiah's day. These were the Lord's Servants?!

Even many of the faithful people in Israel gave up. They were crying out, "all the times we've tried to serve God --it seems like it was for nothing." Even the seemingly loyal servants of the Lord in Israel we see cry out in failure: "It seems like I've led, prophesied, lived in vain. It's left me with heartache, pains, frustration, and where is the glory for God?" The once bold, "We will do everything the Lord says," fell into an embarrassed silence amidst failure and guilt.

God has also called us to serve him. And our goal remains the same: "To display the Lord's splendor." We are made to be the "light of the world." Our Lord tells us to do good so that people will "praise our Father in heaven." Shouldn't we be able to say: *The Lord said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."*? We are called to be willing to be servants who are not just on call, but always on duty.

And yes, many Christians have endeavored to carry out this task. Local and international Christian organizations exist to show the world that they are "God's people." But how have we lived up to this task? Have you always spoken every word as the Lord's Servant or have your words sometimes served to your own purpose? Can any of us boast, "I'm the true servant of the Lord!?" Have you always been willing and ready to serve him even if it conflicts with what you might find most important? If it conflicts with your time, your schedule, your favorite sport, activity, hobby, or program do you put serving him first? And maybe for a time you do put serving God first. How did that go? It doesn't always seem to be bringing the results you'd expect. And when things don't go the way that we expect we sometimes sigh, "Why bother? Why should I carry out the task God has assigned me?" This is all the case so that many Christian pastors, leaders, and parents cry out in frustration. "It seems like I've taught, led, been a willing servant of the Lord in vain. It has left me with heartache, pains, frustration." And where is the glory for God?

Have you ever wondered what you wanted to be when you grow up? Children aren't always sure just what they want to be when they grow up, but they have some ideas. Often their answers are so child-like they can be funny. One young child in my family said over thirty years ago, "When I grow up, I want to be a grandma. They get to give out candy." I recall the desire to be an architect – yet not the typical one. I wanted to be an architect for the Lego company. But we all soon realize the job isn't all fun and games. Some aspire to the noble (and necessary) job of garbage pickup. Then they get to ride the truck. There would be a lot more garbage truck drivers if every little boy had his childhood dream job. Many find the task more challenging than they thought. And just how many astronauts would there be if we all held onto our childhood desired role in life? Hopes are crushed as they realize how difficult it is. But who is born saying, "I want to be the Lord's Servant!" Your job description: bring glory to God. Is this a role you fill? Could you do it? Who can live up to such a task? We all must come to the crushing conclusion: it is far more difficult than I ever would have imagined! How can we ever meet the role of "the Lord's Servant"? I for one cannot. No one in Israel could do it and neither can anyone in this world.

That not only leaves God without glory from us, but it also leaves us in the worst position. All of us are condemned for the times we brought shame to the one who called us to be his own. We are not fired from our position. We are doomed to suffer and die. We lost our high calling and fell into the lowest pit of despair as condemned sinners.

That is why we hear an especially important conversation that takes place in Isaiah 49. We hear someone who knows God has assigned his life position. He knows his role in life from birth, exactly what he will be when he grows up: the Lord's perfect servant. And we'll see just how important it is that he took on this task.

The whole world needs to hear about this servant of the Lord. He announced a message for all: *"Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations. Who am I? The one true Servant of the Lord. Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name."* There was one person who truly fits this bill: he is the one spoken of by the prophets. He is the one who said to Moses "I am" and he is the one to be born called "Mighty God." Only he is called by God in such a way before he is born. And just before he came to this world it was said, *"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save the people from their sins."* Jesus the one true Servant of the Lord.

The Servant of the Lord continues: *"He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,"* The Jews who heard him were all amazed and said, *"We have never heard anyone speak with such authority."* The Word he spoke was the Word of God. He never failed in speaking it. The servant of the Lord says: *"In the shadow of his hand, he hid me."* Christ alone knew the Father; he came from the Father's side. And so, God's servant also says, *"He made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver."* God had the plan to use his Son to accomplish his goals. And Jesus was poised and ready to do his Father's will. And when the time had fully come, God sent his Son. Jesus, you see, was the secret weapon.

The true Servant of the Lord continues: *"He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'"* He is born from Israel, an Israelite, who would do what all other Israelites could not accomplish: display God's splendor! We heard how in Jesus' baptism the Father declared, *"This is my Son. With him I am well pleased!"* And Isaiah also spoke of this servant of the Lord who was anointed by the Holy Spirit: We read in Isaiah 42 *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him."*

That perfect chosen servant, Jesus, carried out the Father's will perfectly. And no, it didn't always appear to be triumph. We see that this servant suffered. As he spoke the Word, people laughed at him, mocked him, deserted him. God's true servant was rejected by many. We read the cries of God's suffering servant in Psalm 22 and we hear it on the cross *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* All his work seemed for loss. But the servant never lost confidence in the goodness of God. *But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; 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."* His victory was due to him. He rose in victory back to life. Isaiah spoke of the Servant of the Lord seeing great victory. So it was for Jesus.

Jesus did what the world could not do. It was all on his shoulders, not ours. The splendor of a gracious and loving God is made known in him. And it is made known not just for Israel: *"And now the Lord says— he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength— <sup>6</sup> he says: "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."*

Sometimes we look at things and see just how much they can really do. If the county purchases a snow plow it isn't going to use it to clear the leaves from the street. When you buy a tool and realize how powerful it is you say, "I could use this for so many things!" Jesus would accomplish what no man ever could. And it would be something for all the world. God says, "It isn't enough that my one and only Son should live and die to save Israel to bring him glory. He will do far more!" Jesus brought restoration and rescue to all the ends of the earth. He brought God glory in all the earth.

Now what task is there left for us? The glory for God has already been won by Christ. This final word we read today from Isaiah 49 demonstrates that the glory is won. The Lord tells his servant, the one who was despised, rejected, killed, that he is now glorious and in victory. Then the Lord says that all will bow before him. The word in Hebrew used here is something which really denotes bowing in worship. This is the response of all who see the true Servant of the Lord! *This is what the Lord says— the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel— to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."* We all now together worship him alone as Lord and serve him as we make the message known as through his church the news of his salvation is brought to all.

All nations, all languages, all cultures together bow down before this True Servant of the Lord in all his glory. He has brought God glory on earth by facing the suffering and cross in our place –it was all his task all along. He has displayed the splendor of our God by demonstrating God's great love for his servants who failed him. Thank God he hasn't placed any unbearable mission upon our shoulders. The very Son, born from Israel, but born God with us was given the task of saving us. We'll continue to look in our series how he now calls us to serve him and bring him glory. We do this as we bow down to the servant of the Lord who was called to bring salvation to all.