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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 22, 2017
3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, John 1:29-41
Hymns: 20; 245; 351; 50:2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 49:1-6

“Listen, O coastlands, to Me,
And take heed, you peoples from afar!
The LORD has called Me from the womb;
From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.

2 And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me,
And made Me a polished shaft;
In His quiver He has hidden Me.”

3 “And He said to me,
‘You are My servant, O Israel,
In whom I will be glorified.’

4 Then I said, ‘I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;
Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD,
And my work with my God.’”

5 “And now the LORD says,
Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,
So that Israel is gathered to Him
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,
And My God shall be My strength),

6 Indeed He says,
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,

And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”
(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Living up to One's potential.

Some people go through life without striving to be the best that they can be. They never reach their potential or achieve what they could have achieved. Others are overachievers. They actually do more than any one thought they could. They work and work and strive for a goal, and actually achieve great things, and still they may be disappointed with life, feeling that they should have accomplished more. Sometimes people fail to appreciate exactly what another has done, perhaps because they had false expectations.

As we examine the life and ministry of Jesus do any of these characterizations apply? To a degree a number of them may be perceived by others. Some looked at Jesus and were disappointed because He was not striving for the goal *they* desired for Him. They had false expectations of what the Messiah should be. Others looked at Jesus and thought He worked too hard. Surely Jesus did work persistently hard. He had great compassion on the people. What is clear from the inspired record is that God the Father was not disappointed in the least. As we look at the inspired record of the evangelists and see how it matches up with the prophetic record we will see --

THEME: God's Glory Revealed in His Servant.

Jesus was that Servant of the Lord referenced by Isaiah the prophet in so many of Isaiah's prophecies. In His Servant –

I. God Reveals His “Secret Weapon.”

Our text reveals God’s agenda for salvation in bold terms. He calls for the people of the world both near and far to pay attention to the One whom He has chosen as His Servant, the One He has chosen to fulfill the mission of salvation which God had planned from the foundation of the earth. Isaiah’s prophecy speaks with the voice of that Servant, and He speaks of the certainty of mission and purpose that was His from the very beginnings of His life. Before He was born, when He was still developing within His mother, He was the Servant of the Lord. And so we know that both Mary and Joseph were told that this Child which was born of Mary was the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

Growing up Jesus knew who He was and what His real purpose and mission in life was to be. As a young child sitting on Mary’s lap, Mary shared with the boy Jesus the wonders surrounding His birth. Even as He was working at Joseph’s side building things, Joseph knew that this was the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah that was to come into this world, Joseph also would have related to Jesus the messages he had received from the angels.

To everyone else He was just Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter. Even then Jesus was the Lord’s secret weapon who was in this world to defeat the enemy, to destroy the works of the devil. Our text reveals that Jesus was fully aware of all this from the very beginning. From the very beginning Jesus was about His Heavenly Father’s business. We recall how at the age of 12 years, when He was allowed to make His first Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem, He stayed behind at the temple, there busy asking questions, studying the Word with the Bible scholars there.

All this was leading up to the actual accomplishment of His mission and the conduct of Jesus’ public ministry. Jesus had come to establish the kingdom of God. He would win the battle against the devil and all adversaries of the Kingdom as the finely honed weapons which the Father had prepared.

Isaiah 49:2 “And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me,
And made Me a polished shaft;

In His quiver He has hidden Me.”

Jesus is the Word made flesh and --

Hebrews 4:12 “The Word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

How often during Jesus’ ministry this was evident as He discerned the hearts of His enemies, and dismissed their accusations and unraveled their trick questions with the Word! Yes, even when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness it was Jesus using the Word of God that defeated the tempter. Jesus was that polished shaft, that arrow that the Lord used to destroy the devil, to crush the serpent’s head, to win for us salvation.

Our text reveals --

II. God’s Confidence in His Servant.

Isaiah 49:3-4 “And He said to me, ‘You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.’ 4 Then I said, ‘I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, And my work with my God.’”

God was confident in addressing His Servant as Israel, the One who strives with God. Even as Jacob wrestled with God and would not let go, so Jesus was that descendent of Jacob who fought alongside the Lord. Jesus laid hold of His heavenly Father, placing all confidence in His Father and striving to fulfill all that God would have Him accomplish. He was God’s secret weapon sent to secure the Kingdom of God. In fulfilling that mission Jesus glorified the Father. Days before His suffering and death Jesus said:

John 12:27-33 “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” 29 Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”

30 Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” 33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

It wasn't easy. Not only was Jesus' soul troubled at the prospect of the death He would die upon the cross, bearing the sin of the world, but also by the people's rejection of His mission. Jesus loved people everywhere. He loved His own people no less than others. He desired to bring them life and salvation. It was His reason and purpose for living. However the Apostle John reminds us of how it went. In the opening chapter of John's gospel we are told that “**He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him**” (John 1:11). Jesus taught the people the truth, that He alone was the way to life, and that they could not abide, and they would not receive Him. So we are told how when people grasped Jesus' message, salvation comes only through faith in Jesus, they rejected it:

John 6:60, 66-69 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” ... 66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” 68 But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

This is the sadness of our Savior that is foretold in our text. It was expressed by our Lord as He looked over Jerusalem just days before His death. Jesus lamented --

Matthew 23:37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!

And yet the Lord would receive His reward. He would accomplish that which the Father had sent Him to do. He would redeem Israel, and He would establish God's Kingdom and draws God's elect to Himself from all the nations. Jesus is –

III. The Savior of the World.

We read the last two verses of our text:

Isaiah 49:5-6 “And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength), 6 Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

In these words we hear Jesus’ confidence that He would accomplish the Father’s goal. He would bring back Jacob, and Israel would be gathered to the Lord once more. God would have His chosen people, but that wouldn’t be limited to the Jews. This wasn’t a matter of failing among the Jews. The gospel is for them yet to this day. Yet to this day it is God’s desire that the people of Israel hear the gospel, and believe and be saved.

What the Lord declares here through Isaiah was that Jesus’ blood and righteousness were so much greater than what was required for the salvation of the Jews that this salvation couldn’t be limited to only one nation. Jesus was a light to the Gentiles. Simeon, who held the infant Jesus in his arms declared this same truth. Jesus is **“a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel”** (Luke 2:32). God provided a Savior great enough to bring salvation to all the world for all time that sinners everywhere might know with confidence that they are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19). And so we know peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. To God all praise and glory!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)