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The Servant of God, Part 2

Isaiah 49:1-6, Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.
The LORD called Me from the womb;
From the body of My mother He named Me.
2 He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a select arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver.
3 He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel,
In Whom I will show My glory."
4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain,

I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;
Yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the LORD,
And My reward with My God.”

- 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him
(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
And My God is My strength),
- 6 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 make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

A prominent theme of Isaiah 40-55 is the sovereignty of God. It is referenced throughout this section.¹ Because of the exile, the nation of Israel was destroyed along with the temple. However, Israel’s ability to observe the Sabbath and its worship of God were only perceived setbacks. God was working in and through all things to bring about His purpose. Isaiah put it this way:

Isaiah 40:27-28, “Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.”

Isaiah 40:15, “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales...”

Truly in and through the exile, God was bringing about His purpose. And that purpose was the proclamation of His glory and grace to the nations! Last week we saw that an important part of the Abrahamic covenant was God’s people being a servant to the nations and thereby “being a blessing” to all people groups! This was part of an everlasting covenant which God made with His people! As such, throughout Isaiah 40-55 God identifies His people as “My servant” (e.g., Isaiah 41:8) and in this context references their call to be a “witness to the nations” (Isaiah 43:10, 12; 44:1-2, 8; 45:4, 6).

Yet we know that Israel as “the servant of God” would prove unfaithful to their calling. They did not see the sovereignty of God and the Lord’s hand in their affliction. As such, they became a servant to fear, distrust, and worry. However, speaking to the people of God, the Lord said this:

Isaiah 42:18-20 (cf. vv. 18-25, “Hear, you deaf! And look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but My servant, or so deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is so blind as he that is at peace *with* Me, or so blind as the servant of the Lord? You have seen many things, but you do not observe *them*; *your* ears are open, but none hears... [notice the result, v. 22...]) But this is a people plundered and despoiled; all of them are trapped

in caves, or are hidden away in prisons; they have become a prey with none to deliver *them*, and a spoil, with none to say, 'Give *them* back!'"

As such, God would raise up another servant, "THE Servant of God," who not only would serve God perfectly, but also serve as a pattern/type for all who have been called as servants of the Lord. Jesus is speaking here:

Isaiah 49:3, "And He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel...'"

Truly, Christ embodied the calling of what Israel was meant to be. John Oswalt explains:

...it is the function, not the identity, of Israel that is emphasized. This Servant is going to function as Israel. (Oswalt, 1986, p. 291)

Do you understand the significance of this? Jesus is the Israel of God! There is all this talk today about God's promises to Israel; well get this: They were/are fulfilled in Christ! He is the Israel of God and all who trust in Him!

In light of this, the general call of Isaiah 51-55 is for God's people to follow the pattern laid down by "The Servant." This no doubt is why Paul called the church, "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). Truly on account of the cross, we have become "the Israel of God"! With that, consider with me the call of Christ and so the call of all would-be servants of God.

The calling of THE servant of God (and this is Christ speaking) and so it represents His detailing of the call that rested on His life.

Isaiah 49:1, "Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb."

This call was intended for all peoples. This is a surprising beginning to this description of The servant of God. We would expect that this servant would come to deliver the household of God who were dispersed, in exile, in Babylon. Yet notice those to whom this passage is written.

Isaiah 49:1, ""Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar."

The references to "islands" and "peoples from afar" would have involved far more than the people of God in exile, but ALL PEOPLES- Jew and Gentile alike! From this we see that the ministry of the servant of God was, in keeping with the Abrahamic covenant, intended for ALL peoples, not just those of a Jewish heritage! That is why we read the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [not just the Jews, but all people groups]...'"

We see in Isaiah, Paul, a Jewish theologian's declaration:

Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

When it comes to the dissemination of the Good News the passion must involve those not only of the household of faith (here called Jews), but also those far off (the Greek).

Isaiah 49:6b-7, "And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and My God is My strength), 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 make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'"

Isaiah 42:6-7, "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from the prison."

Truly, the scope of the ministry of "the Servant of God" would be ALL Peoples; not just the ethnic Jew, the ceremonially clean, or translated to our culture, the in-crowd, the likeable, the good looking, or the friendly. NO! Christ calls ALL men to submission, obedience, and so the service of the Lord! That is the Savior who you love and that is the call to which you have been set apart in redemption!

This call is also sovereignly administered and so determined.

Isaiah 49:1, "Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called Me from the womb."

The emphasis in this verse is on "the Lord" who "calls"! The word for "Lord" in this text is Yahweh! In other words, Christ is saying, "My calling rests with the Sovereign One, the One who reigns, the Omnipotent One. He is the one who called me; He is the one I serve!" Notice the word for "called" the term is used not in relation to the call to ministry, but that of a "sovereign appointment." The thought is not of a "calling" to be a prophet, but of a sovereign conscription to a specific purpose or function.

This is significant because throughout the course of history, there have been many self-proclaimed servants of God. Think of it. The foundation of almost every movement, cult, or religion is this conviction: "God is on our side."

- The Caesars of Rome.
- Alexander the Great.

- Napoleon.
- Mohammed.
- Most if not all cult leaders.

Each ruled with the conviction that God was on their side! Yet in reality, these men ultimately were servants of themselves!

However, this is not true of THE Servant of God! He/Christ went about His work with the understanding that He did not come to serve Himself, but God. It wasn't so much that God was on His side, but that He was on God's side! As subtle as this may sound, it is important! Christ filled the priestly office and the Hebrew writer describes this:

Hebrews 5:4-5, "And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.'"

John 5:30, "...I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

And such is what is described of "The Servant" in Isaiah:

Isaiah 42:5-6, "Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk in it, 'I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations.'"

The terminology of "calling" and "appointing" denote a sovereign determination! The Servant of this passage was in God's command! Truly Christ was called and sent by God unto the ministry of God's Kingdom. As such, all that He did was bound and governed NOT by His own will, BUT the will of the Lord. It was God who called the shots! And so we read this:

John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work."

Truly, Christ was CALLED by God! From the content of His message, to the minutest details of His ministry, Christ's service was according to the will of the Lord! And as ones who have been made to be servants of God, we too must serve according to God's will, word, and pleasure!

Christ's calling has at its end salvation from sin and Satan.

Isaiah 49:1, "The Lord called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me."

That Christ was "called" and "named" speaks of His mission; He was divinely summoned and so named unto a specific end. What was that end? Why did Christ come? To answer this we need

only reflect upon the significance of this “servant” in the book of Isaiah. And to do that, consider with me once again.

Isaiah 49:5-6, “And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and My God is My strength), 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 make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

Why was Christ commissioned?

1. To secure the exiled people who truly loved the Lord AND
2. To deliver all peoples from sin! How would He do this?

Speaking of THE Servant of God (Isaiah 49:11) Isaiah wrote this:

Isaiah 53:4-5, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.”

The Servant of God was sent by God to give His life as a sacrifice for sin! And what would be the result?

Isaiah 53:11, “As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it* and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.”

Truly, when we read of the call of the Servant of God that, “...the Lord called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me” we understand the purpose of this calling: the salvation of God’s people and so their deliverance from the domain of sin and Satan. And brothers and sisters, that too necessarily will be what our calling as “servants of God” is all about!

We see the call of the Servant of God:

1. It was intended for all peoples,
2. It was sovereignly administered and so determined, and
3. It has as its end salvation from sin and Satan.

The word that comes to mind as we consider this calling in relation to the Christian; the followers of THE Servant of God, is “saint.” When we read in the Bible about something or someone who is “holy” we find that “holy” literally means to be set apart. When “holy” is

used of God, it references the fact that He is different/other than creation. As such, He is above it and so beyond it! When “holy” is used of anything in creation “holy” refers to something that is different by virtue of its association with God. And so while there may be many.

- Temples on this earth, a “holy temple” is a temple made unique/different by virtue of its association with God. *Accordingly, it could not be used as a dining hall. It was for one purpose: the Lord!*
- Priests on this earth, a “holy priest” is a person made unique/different by virtue of his association with God. *He was in the service of the Lord alone!*
- Special and unique places on this earth abound, but any and all places associated with God become “holy ground.” *You would not nap there!*
- Take the holy vessels used in worship. Because of their association with the worship of God, *they would never be utilized for daily use!*

What does this have to do with the word “saint”? The Biblical term used for “saint” is ἅγιος (*hagios*) which literally means “a holy one.” A saint is someone whom God has claimed for Himself and so has set apart for a specific purpose. This was Christ as “the Servant of God” who consequently did not come to do His will, but the will of Him who sent Him. This must be our understanding when it comes to our lives! By virtue of the redeeming work of Christ, we have been set apart unto God as vessels for His purpose and glory. We no longer are for “common use.”

Accordingly, and quite at odds with our world, we exist for Another. Come to realize this, and you will live to pour your life out on the altar of God’s Kingdom, and say with John the Baptist, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Paul, “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself” (Acts 20:24). “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). And Habakkuk, “Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17b-18). And the Servant, “...I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30).

What a difference this understanding would have made to God’s people in the exile! Their plight was no accident. They had been born and raised for this purpose! In the words of Mordecai, it truly was “...for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

Now, this confession involves serving Christ on His terms according to His will, and this is scary. For it involves a level of insecurity, for we do not know how God is going to use us! Yet in keeping with another important theme of Isaiah 40-55, take courage, the God who you serve is Sovereign and Good! Accordingly, in the words of Peter, we must “...entrust our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (1 Peter 4:19). Or as C. S. Lewis put it², “Is He safe? No! But He’s good!”

That brings us to a description of the primary tool of the Servant of God and so our primary .

Isaiah 49:2, "And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword."

This clearly is a reference to the tool of this Servant. Unlike Cyrus (the Persian King who in Isaiah is prophesied as the one who would restore God's people to Jerusalem) whose primary weapon was the sword/military power (Isaiah 41:2), the Servant of our passage possesses as His "sword" His "mouth."

Now what does that mean? That the Servant's "sharp sword" was His "mouth" tells us that His WORD would be His weapon, the tool of His trade. Recall that there is nothing passive about God's word.

Hebrews 4:12, "...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword..."

And such was the case for our Lord when He walked the earth. Christ served NOT with rocks, slings, or a sword, but with the Word of God! Consider also as Christ entered into the ministry of His kingdom, like Adam and Eve before Him, He first had to respond to a series of temptations from Satan. Having just been declared "the Son of God" via His baptism (Matthew 3:17), Jesus was commissioned to go into the desert by which God would demonstrate Christ's true identity! But unlike Adam and Eve, Christ resisted Satan's devices. How? By quoting the word of God. To each temptation, Christ said, "...IT IS WRITTEN!..." (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

In John 10, Christ was about to be stoned to death on account of the Jewish claim that He committed blasphemy. How did He respond? With threats? With manipulation? NO! Christ simply appealed to the word of God!

John 10:31-34a, "The Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, 'I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?' The Jews answered Him, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.' Jesus answered them, 'Has it not been written in your Law...'"

In Matthew 26 Peter drew his sword and Christ told him to put it back? Why?

2 Corinthians 10:4, "...the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

And thus we are not surprised to read of the glorified Christ.

Revelation 1:16, "And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword..."

Truly, the weapon of Christ while on this earth was THE Word of God- either by quoting it or trusting it!³ And so in Isaiah it is this "tool" that is identified as "the Servant's" weapon.

Isaiah 11:4, "But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked."

Isaiah 49:2, "And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword..."

And as servants of God, we too have as our chief tool the word of God (cf. 2 Peter 1:19 [cf. vv. 16-18])! Yet how are we to use the word? Has God indicated how He would have us use this tool?

Isaiah 49:2, "In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me."

This is a rather interesting qualification. As God prepared THE Servant for His ministry by "making His mouth like a sharp sword," God nevertheless "concealed" the Servant "in the shadow of His hand." And what does that mean?

This means simply that the weapon of the word of God was NOT a broad sword (like the Roman *rhomphaia*) to be carried about on the Servant's waist, BUT a hidden dagger (like the Roman *machaira*, Ephesians 6:17) to be used in close proximity with precision! In other words, it is not enough to have mastered the content of God's word, we must also strive to use it with the precision of a skilled surgeon!

This was the case with Christ. Recall the contrasting encounters Jesus had in John 3 and 4. In John 3, Christ addressed an arrogant, proud teacher of the Law, Nicodemus. With precision and skill, He overwhelmingly rebuked Him. But then in John 4, this obviously powerful teacher of the Law (as evidenced in John 3) led the Samaritan woman to a knowledge of the truth with patience, gentleness, and longsuffering! Christ was no "bull in a china shop." Rather He used the weapon of the word of God deliberately and with much skill!

Isaiah 42:1-3, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. [And how will He do this?] He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish..."

The emphasis is that Christ- THE Servant of God- would be a skilled prophet who would heal God's people and so bring about God's will with God's word! We are called to nothing less!

2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

Yet practically speaking: What does that look like? How do we handle the word of God accurately? The faithful use of God's Word means that we will use it according to its and our

ultimate end.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [which obviously will involve some facet of the word] are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."

What is the ultimate end of any battle as servants of Christ? It is threefold.

1. Engaging the world around us which vaunts itself above Christ.
2. Endeavoring ourselves to submit to the word- taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.
3. Encouraging the body of Christ to do the same- "punishing all disobedience" is a reference to fellowship.

Now none of this is accomplished if we stand on a street corner and bark out God's word. Each of these involves personal, one on one interaction either with the Lord, a fellow believer, or the non-Christian!

From all of this do you get a sense of the life to which you have been called in Christ?

1. First, we are not our own. We are at the disposal of God and must learn to be content to be used by God however He wills!
2. Secondly, THE tool of our trade is NOT manipulation or self-will, BUT the word of God with which we are to labor unto three things.
 - a. Our own personal submission to it.
 - b. The building up and encouraging of the body of Christ with it.
 - c. The striving with the non-Christian world that they might submit to it!

"This is the way the Master went; should not the servant tread it still⁴?"

End Notes

¹ Isaiah 40:12-31; 44:9-20, 24-28; 45:8-25; 46:5-11.

² "Is - is he a man?" asked Lucy. "Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly, "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion, the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh," said Susan, "I thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie, and make no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." "Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver, "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king I tell you."

³ And thus we read that the "fulfillment of Scripture" compelled Christ in all that He did, Mark. 9:12, 13; 14:49; John 13:18; 17:12 (cf. 12:14). Notice further, Christ announced with confidence that given events will certainly take place, "For it is written," Matthew 26:31; Mark 24:27 (cf. Luke 20:17). And although

holding at His command ample means of escape, He bows before on-coming calamities, for He asks, "...[how otherwise] should the scriptures be fulfilled?..." Matthew 26:54.
⁴ *Red Trinity Hymnal* #584.

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About the Preacher

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