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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**God Gives and God Takes Away**

**Isaiah 49:1-2**

**Prayer:** *Father, we do thank you and praise you for your goodness, and we do thank you and praise you for the gift of your Son. I thank you for your word, Lord, that we can grow and expand our understanding of what it is that he has done for us, what it is you have done for us in giving us your Son. And Father, as we again look into your servant song, I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, I pray that you would guide us, open up our hearts and by your spirit's power, enable us to see more of your Son, enable us to worship him in a deeper, more profound way, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are examining the servant songs of Isaiah, and there are four of them, they are prophetic messages identifying and speaking to and about the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Now, they're called songs because they're written in a unique form of Hebrew poetry and they're scattered throughout the book of Isaiah. God spoke to and through and about his son in these servant songs, and it's entirely possible that Jesus as a man

learned of his role as Messiah by studying these songs in Isaiah. The scripture says that Jesus grew in knowledge and understanding and that he learned obedience through suffering. It paints a portrait of Jesus voluntarily choosing to discover his mission by understanding what the Spirit revealed through the scripture, by having to discover on his own through the same scriptures that we have the full extent of his identity as Messiah. So it's entirely possible that the Father used the servant songs of Isaiah to instruct his beloved Son in the role that he would have as the suffering servant.

The first part of our servant song this morning is *Isaiah 49:1-2* which says this, it says: *Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.* The passage opens with Jesus' affirmation of the role he had as savior, and the Son begins by crying out his qualifications: *Listen to me, O, coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.* Jesus in his humanity may have discovered his role as Messiah through the scriptures, but that doesn't mean that he discovered this role and then decided to embrace it. What he is

saying in this song is that he was called to this role while he was in his mother's womb. But the womb of Mary was hardly the place where Christ had his beginning. Jesus made it crystal clear that he preexisted his earthly existence when he engaged the Pharisees about who he was. In *John 8:56-59*, Jesus said this, he said: *"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.* Now to the Pharisees' blind eyes, this was a man in his 30s claiming to have seen Abraham who had died hundreds of years previously. And Jesus goes one better than that. He tells them that before Abraham even came into being, he was fully and completely existent. Furthermore, he describes himself as eternally presently existent, someone whose existence is really outside of time itself, a quality that only God could enjoy. You see, Jesus didn't just say, *Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was I was.* Instead he said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you before Abraham was, I am."* In other words, he was the eternally preexistent God who on our behalf stepped into the constraints of time to live life itself. And he lived it on a day in, day out basis like you and me. And part of the constraint that he lived under lies in something that Job actually identifies as part of

God's interaction with his children. After all of these disasters had befallen Job, after he is stripped of virtually everything, he utters a statement that may be the most famous words ever uttered in scripture. They illustrate his willingness to accept God's wisdom in areas of personal loss that would otherwise be absolutely baffling. He said this in *Job 1:21*, he said: *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."* We'll see that God's servant speaks about God's giving and taking in a similar vein in Isaiah's servant song. You see, God gives to his servant but then he takes away.

God gives: *He made my mouth like a sharp sword;*

God takes away: *In the shadows of his hand, he hid me;*

God gives: *He made me a polished arrow;*

God takes away: *In his quiver he hid me away.*

Let's see how this works in the life of God's suffering servant. You see, we know for a fact that Jesus was indeed that sharp sword. John in the book of Revelation gets a vision of Jesus as that sword. In *Revelation 1:12*, he says this, he says: *Then I*

turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

John saw Jesus as he truly is. No longer the meek and gentle lamb, he is now revealed as the lion of the tribe of Judah and John's reaction is perfectly appropriate. Verse 17, he says: *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.* See, the sword of the Lord was terrifying. The servant song of Isaiah that we're looking at this morning paints a picture of God both giving his servant the gifts and the glory that he is due but then in God's own wisdom, taking those very gifts and hiding them away. *He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me.* You see, the mouth that spoke like a sharp sword would be hidden in his

Father's hand. The very same word that spoke the stars into being, that terrified and confounded demons, that commanded nature itself, the word that *Hebrew 4:12* says is: *Living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him whom we must give an account,* that word, that word would first be reduced to near non-existence. The greatest power the world has ever known would empty himself of that power to become a living entity that started out as everyone of us starts out, as a zygote, a clump of cells no bigger than a period at the end of that sentence. The Word would become life at the very border of non-existence clinging to the womb of a peasant girl named Mary. Just consider the fact that at the very start of Jesus' earthly journey, he was two cells away from physical annihilation. And those two became four, and those four became eight and those eight, sixteen, and just like you and me, he grew and developed in his mother's womb. But unlike you and me, he was the greatest power the universe has ever known.

Again, *Isaiah 49: Listen to me, O, coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he name my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me. Well, after nine*

months in the womb, the mouth that spoke creation and authority and judgment had been reduced to the whimpering cry of a human baby. God gave and God took away. The voice that spoke the universe into being was no longer capable even of simple speech. The king of the universe was now hidden in his Father's hand. *He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand, he hid me.* Well, the servant goes on to say: *He made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.* God did with Jesus what he has done with all of his prophets, what he has done and is still doing with all of us. He makes us into polished arrows.

You know, if you want to make an arrow, first thing you have to do is just -- you have to find the right kind of tree or sapling and it needs to be straight and true and if it's a branch, it needs to be cut away from the tree and have the bark stripped off it, and then you bundle it, you dry it and you make sure that it stays straight, and after it's dried, you cut a notch in it for tail feathers and on the other end you cut a notch for an arrow head. God's Son was that arrow. He was shaped and scraped and polished into God's chosen arrow by living life like you and I live life, in a family with brothers and sisters, except Jesus lived that life perfectly.

John MacArthur puts it this way, he says: "This child had been

nothing but a joy. After escaping Herod, after escaping the slaughter, they had returned back from Egypt to Nazareth. They had lived there for these years. The child had been nothing but obedient, nothing but compliant, nothing but submissive, nothing but loving. And certainly Mary loved that. That Son like no other child and certainly that Son loved her like no one ever loved her. One can only imagine what it was like to have a perfect child, the sinless one, God in human flesh with all the sensitivity and tenderness and kindness and mercy and grace that that child could bring to bear upon her life and Joseph's."

That tenderness, that kindness was tested by Jesus at the age of twelve when he confronted his parents in the temple. *Luke 2:40* says this, it says: *And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and his mother did not know it.*

So they as a family have gone up to this Passover feast and the feast is over and the family sets out for home, and Joseph it seems thought that Jesus was with Mary; Mary thought Jesus was with



Joseph, and by the time they realized it, they are a full day's journey out. Well, the scripture says they sought Jesus among their relatives and acquaintances with no success and so in a panic they're making their way back to Jerusalem, and after three full days, they find Jesus in the temple. At age twelve, he was astounding the religious leaders with the depth of his wisdom and knowledge of scripture. Now, the teachers of course didn't realize that his knowledge of scripture was an author's knowledge because he was the author of scripture itself. See, thousands of years before these teachers were even born, the Word had been moving in the hearts and mind of the prophets as they wrote out the mind of God, and that same word had become flesh and twelve years later he's now teaching in the temple. Verse 46 says: *Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature,*

*and in favor with God and men.*

I want you to imagine what it must have been like for parents in the first century. Now, it was fairly routine for children to just vanish without a trace. You know, we have amber alerts, we have the FBI; back then had they had nothing. And we think of these incidents as a parents' worst nightmare and you can almost hear Mary's unhappiness that she and Joseph had to bear such a terror. *His mother said to him, "Son why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."* Mary's words seem to be a very typical mixture of relief and frustration as she and Joseph would be put through such a trial. And Jesus' response, at first glance it seems almost heartless, verse 49: *And he said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"* This from a twelve-year-old. You know, we ask is this a classic conflict between adolescent and parent? Well, the answer's no, it couldn't be. You know, the word "conflict" is really just a polite way of describing sin and Jesus we know is without sin. So why did he give what appeared to be almost a -- a cavalier response to parents who are literally worried sick by his absence? Well, the answer lies in the very next verse, verse 50 says: *But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.* See, Jesus was twelve years old at the time. It had been twelve years since his miraculous birth,

it's been years since the Magi had visited, it was twelve years since Simeon had pronounced this prophesy on the infant Jesus. He said this in *Luke 2:30*: *For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.*" And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. For twelve years now, Jesus had been the perfect child, no temper tantrums, no fights with his siblings, no irresponsibility; just complete and total obedience. God who gives and who takes away was making Jesus into a polished arrow that he would soon hide away in his quiver. *He made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.*

You see, the who of who Jesus was had been captured by him living life itself and in some ways he was just a kid, and the twelve years that Jesus spent growing up in Nazareth, three things were happening that could have easily escaped human notice because the "who" of Jesus was growing. *Luke 2:40* says: *And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.* Jesus was being filled with wisdom, spirit and grace. The arrow was being polished. He was discovering the meaning of Simeon's words spoken twelve years earlier, he was to be: *"A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel."* Again, *Luke 2:33* says: *Joseph and his mother*

marveled at those things which were spoken of him. And now in the temple those things are actually beginning to take place. They center around Jesus' growing awareness of what he is called to do. Verse 48: *So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and his mother said to Him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know I must be about My Father's business?"* Jesus wasn't being cavalier. Instead he was being brutally honest. He was marking a distance between Jesus the Son of Man and Jesus the Son of God. Jesus was declaring who his real Father was. *Luke 2:33* says: *Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him.* It's very careful language, because Jesus' father was not Joseph. His mother was Mary but the seed that produced Jesus was of the Holy Spirit, and the more Jesus knew who he was perhaps through the servant songs themselves, the more determined he was to do what he was called to do. Jesus had to be about his Father's business. And his Father's business from the dawn of time could be summed up in one simple sentence from *2 Corinthians 5:19*: *That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.*

You see, ever since the fall in the Garden of Eden, mankind had been at war with God. Adam and Eve had the first child, and one of those children between Cain and Abel committed the first murder and

things spiraled downward from there. *Genesis 6:5* says: *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.* So God wipes out the earth with a worldwide flood and then he establishes a new covenant of grace with Noah and his family. Well, the teachers that Mary and Joseph found Jesus sitting among had been part of this system that God had provided to cover the sins of the faithful and they were teaching that God had provided the blood of lambs and bulls and rams and goats to cover over man's sin and they quoted from *Leviticus 17:11*: *For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.* But God knew that the blood of animals could only cover over sin, it could not remove it because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins according to *Hebrews 10:4*. So a perfect God demanded perfect justice and realized it could only remove sin by paying for it with his own blood. What the teachers in the temple didn't realize is that all of the sacrifices and all of the shed blood of all the lambs and bulls and goats that had been shed for sin for years were all pointing towards one ultimate sacrifice that would not be an animal; it would be God himself. God would reconcile himself to the world through Christ. God himself would come to earth to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And

that perfect Lamb was the twelve-year-old boy *"In the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at his understanding and answers."*

Here sat Jesus listening and questioning his teachers seeking to grow the same way we seek to grow, line on line, precept on precept. Little did his teachers know that this twelve-year-old in their midst had created the very earth that the temple had sat on, the air that they were breathing and the very lungs they used to breathe that air with. *Philippians 2:6* says: *He being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

So in reality, Mary and Joseph come upon a scene unlike many other in all of Israel's history. Taking up verse 46: *Now it was so that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. But then Jesus does something astonishing. Verse 51 says: Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. Just as Isaiah's servant song had predicted: God had given and God was now taking away.*

Jesus went back to the backwater town of Nazareth with his parents. *He made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.* Why would Jesus go back to absolute obscurity, to be subject to a mother and stepfather who by their own words didn't even understand him? Why did Jesus so willingly embrace being hidden in God's quiver? From an earthly standpoint, it looked positively foolish. Here at the temple Jesus could put his wisdom on display, he could teach people every single day, he could glorify God by astounding people with his intellect and his understanding. Back in Nazareth he would have to occupy himself cutting and shaping wood in his stepfather's carpenter shop. The world of the temple and of the law and of the teachers was calling him but instead he chose to obey, to be folded back into the Father's quiver, because he was about his Father's business. And his Father's business was reconciling God to the world through Christ. 21 years later that reconciliation would bring the only perfect man to the cross. And there the perfect Lamb of God would take on the sin of the world and pay for that sin with his blood. So why was he willing even at age twelve to go back into complete obscurity? Well, *Hebrews 12* gives us the answer, it says this, it says: *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

You know, Tim Keller pointed it out and I love to repeat it over and over and over again, Jesus did it for joy. He did it for the joy that was set before him. Jesus already had the love of his father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit from eternity past, so that could not have been the joy that was set before him. He already had the glory that he had with his Father before time had begun and we know that because Jesus said in *John 17:5*: "*And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*" So his glory with the Father could not have been the joy that was set before him. And so if it wasn't the love and fellowship with the Father and the Spirit that he already had and if it wasn't the glory with the Father that he already had, then what was the joy that was set before Christ? We know it was a joy so profound that he was willing to endure complete obscurity and then the cross in order to obtain it. Here's the amazing part. The joy that Jesus went to the cross for was you and me. That was his joy. It was every one of his chosen sheep that Jesus had come to die for. That was his Father's business that he had to be about. *2 Corinthians 5:19*: *That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.* And you know, God had a plan to do just that. And Jesus announced that plan in the servant song, *Isaiah 49* again: *Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my*



*name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.*

So at age twelve, he entered that quiver. Now at age twelve, I knew enough to pass seventh grade. At age twelve, he knew every single thing I would ever study. At age twelve I knew I was a sinner. At age twelve, he knew he was flawless. At age twelve, I knew that my future was high school. At age twelve, he knew that his future was the cross. At age twelve, Jesus went on to death row, and every day for the next 21 years he woke up knowing that he was headed to slaughter. 21 years later that boy would be a man dying on a cross, and three days later he would rise from the dead, having purchased our redemption with his own blood. From his time in the temple to the start of his public ministry was some 18 years from age twelve to age 30 and for all of that time, Jesus was content to be a polished arrow held in God's quiver because he knew that God's timetable is nothing like ours, particularly those of us in the west. He knew that God works in seasons. He knew that there are springtimes and harvests, planting and reaping, slowness then suddenness, and that's always been God's timetable. He doesn't work on a clock. He doesn't work on a calendar. God makes pronouncements and then he goes silent. He told Abraham that he would have a son; he went silent for 25 years. He set Moses apart

from birth and then he sent him for 40 years into the wilderness. He gave Joseph a dream of great leadership, and then he went silent for years. Simeon tells Joseph and Mary that Jesus would be the light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel, then Jesus' life goes silent. That changed only for a moment right there in the temple, and in a sense, the world was beckoning, had he stayed at the temple, had he remained in that teaching circle, his fame would have spread like wildfire. His mother and stepfather actually interrupted him while he was about his Father's business, but that business was all about humility, servanthood, and obedience. And Jesus had made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. He went from a world that marveled how smooth and polished the arrow had become where the great teachers in the temple were amazed and astonished at his understanding back to the Master's quiver in a carpenter's shop in a backwater town where his life would return to that of a humble carpenter's assistant. Verse 51: *Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them.*

You know, God does in our lives exactly what he's done in the lives of -- the life of his Son. He gives and he takes away. *He made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.* The polishing is what we call sanctification. It is God's shaping and molding us into the very image of his Son, and this never happens without

pain. God is determined to remove the bark, the dirt, and the grime of this world and to sand, shave, cut, carve and mold the shaft until it is straight and true, until it points to the image of his Son. Furthermore he tells us that every single event in our life is aimed and pointed toward that one end. *Romans 8:28: For we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* Then right after shaping the arrow, God does something sometimes that is even more painful. He shapes it, he carves it, he molds it, and then he puts it away in his quiver. We've seen in the scripture how he did that with Abraham for 25 years, with Moses for 40, with Joseph for the time that he spent in the quiver of an Egyptian jail wondering why God had seemingly had abandoned him. In fact if we look, we will see that he did it with all the Old Testament patriarchs. We will see that he also did it in the New Testament with Paul. You know, a brilliant biblical scholar blinded by a vision of Jesus himself shaped, molded, and polished and then sent off to Damascus and Tarsus for years. Now, if it was good enough for the patriarchs and Paul and Jesus himself, I guess my question this morning is this, what makes us think that God is not going to do that in our lives?

You know, there are two types of people that come to mind when we

consider God molding us into his arrows and then putting us away to await his timing. There are two types of people that really understand how that works and they are soldiers and athletes. You know, if you ever talk to a soldier, you often here them to say how anxious they are to actually go into combat because their time is spent over and over and over again practicing, training, preparing. The same is true with athletes. You know, on game day we may get to see an athlete run a perfect wheel route, make a circus catch but what we don't see is the four or five hundred times that he's practiced that in obscurity. The same is absolutely true with musicians. It is especially true with God's children. Over and over and over again, God's arrows are being prepared and then carefully placed in the quiver awaiting the perfect time of deployment. It is the training that gets difficult, it is the training that gets tedious. *Titus 2:11* says this, it says: *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* That verse describes life in the quiver. That's life spent training and waiting for "*Our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*" And you know what? The body of Christ, the church, that really is a training

facility. It's a place that we go to to practice. It's a place that we go to learn about the King and His kingdom and the place that we have in that kingdom. It's also the place where we learn some of the harder lessons about how to get along with people we may not have anything in common with except Jesus Christ. It's also the place where we learn that the things that God is doing to shape us into his arrows often times feel anything but loving and kind, but they're good. And we learn that it's okay to be placed in the quiver. Because God giveth and God taketh away, and often times that hurts. It's where we realize that the pattern that God has established in his saints and in his word is such and because we've seen it so many times in scripture, we are better able to cope with what is often completely baffling. You know, Paul saw it and Paul understood it in *2 Corinthians 4:8*, he said this, he said: *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.* You know, the suffering servant in Isaiah understood that and the question for us to ask ourselves this morning is do we? God gives and God takes away. Can you still say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord?"

You know, are you undergoing a hard training right now? Is God

planing, shaping, and molding you into a polished arrow by knocking off some of the hard edges, freeing up the grime, getting rid of the dirt? That's never a pain-free process, and it's okay to ask God where are you in all of this. It is also immensely encouraging to realize all the great saints who went before us who went through the exact same shaping process. We learn it's okay to be perplexed but not driven to despair, that it's okay to be struck down but not destroyed. Remember, it was Jesus himself speaking in the servant song who said: *The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.* For most of Jesus' life, his sharp sword remind silenced. His polished arrow was hidden away until God's timing was perfect. God gives and God takes away. Trust God that what he's done in the life of the Son he will do in your life and mine as well. Trust that his training is hard, but it is good. As Paul said to Timothy in *1 Timothy 4:15: Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you for your servant songs, I thank you for what Isaiah has revealed about part of what Jesus is going through. I*

*thank you, Lord, that the process that he has undergone, all of us saints undergo. I thank you, Lord, that we may have a sharp sword but we are hidden in your hand. I thank you that we may be a polished arrow but we are placed within your quiver to await your perfect timing. Lord, it just tells us that sometimes you give, sometimes you take away, but all things work towards one goal, one purpose, conformity to your Son's image. Give us the ability to recognize that, give us the ability to see that in the lives of the saints and to take encouragement from that, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*