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"I Have Labored in Vain"

Isaiah 49:3-4

Prayer: *Father God, we do thank you for your grace, we thank you for the enormous gift that you've given to us of your son. Father, we acknowledge how hopelessly lost we were before that gift. And Father, I just thank you for the additional gift of your Holy Spirit, and we pray that as we open up your book to look more into what you have done for us, that your Spirit would accompany us, that you would give us the ability to understand more deeply what you've revealed and that we again would make this a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we're doing a series on the servant songs of Isaiah, and the servant songs are a prophetic message speaking to and about the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. They're called songs because they are written in a unique form of Hebrew poetry and they're scattered throughout the book of Isaiah. God spoke to, 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.

Last week we started looking at the second servant song of Isaiah and we saw there was a principle there that Job first gave voice to, and it applies to Jesus as well as to all of us. It's one of the most famous statements in all of scripture, Job said, "*The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.*" We saw that very principle applied in the opening lines of the servant song that we're looking at this morning. This is *Isaiah 49*, it says this: *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.*

Jesus as God's chosen servant is given a sharp sword. His mouth becomes a sharp sword. But for most of Jesus' public ministry it was taken away. It was taken away by the Father. The sharp sword remained hidden in the shadow of his Father's hand. God also made his servant into a polished arrow; a weapon that God could use. By making his servant a high priest, one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin, God shaped, God carved, God molded his servant but then he put him away. He put him away in his quiver for years. See, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. We saw that played out last time in the confrontation that

Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy in the temple in Jerusalem had with Mary and with his stepfather Joseph. At age twelve, Jesus was astounding the teachers and the religious leaders when his mother and stepfather came upon him in the temple and they were upset because it had been three days and they hadn't found him. But he insisted that he had to be about his Father's business. Part of that business included learning from and instructing the great teachers in the temple in Jerusalem. We saw that Jesus was clearly making a distinction between his earthly stepfather Joseph and his genuine heavenly father. But then we saw that Jesus did something astounding. At age twelve, Jesus voluntarily traded in life at the center of culture and faith in Jerusalem for an obscure existence as his stepfather's carpenter's helper in a backwater town in Nazareth. Once again God had given and God had taken away. And yet Jesus never, never stopped blessing the name of God.

Well, in Isaiah's servant song, the one that we're looking at this morning, God goes on to describe a dialogue that takes place between Father and Son about the nature of the Son's role as our suffering servant. *Isaiah 49:3-4* says this: *And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God."*

You see, it's hundreds of years before Jesus will even be born and yet he's describing his future here as his past, and he describes a shocking level of disappointment, frustration, and even despair at the ministry that he has to undertake. He says, "*I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.*" The language sounds very similar to Solomon's despair in life itself in the book of Ecclesiastes. This is what Solomon said in *Ecclesiastes 2:11*, he said: *Then he considered all that my hands had done and all the toil that I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*

Well, the difference between Solomon and Jesus couldn't be more stark. Solomon's despair came from exploring every single aspect of life under the sun. *Ecclesiastes 2:10* says: *And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.* Solomon's saying that he used all of the grace, strength and wisdom and power that he had to pursue all that this world could offer him and he found that it couldn't sustain him. But Jesus from start to finish was about his Father's kingdom rather than any earthly kingdom. Everything he did he did to glorify his Father. And yet it seems from this one statement

that Jesus also arrives at a dead end. You know, we follow the life of Christ in an historically linear fashion. We think of his birth in Bethlehem, we think of his adolescence in Nazareth, we think of his public ministry in and around Jerusalem, but Jesus, he saw it all from start to finish. He saw a creation in rebellion for eons that would forsake and deeply resent all that he would do to rescue it from its folly. His public ministry began with his reading in the temple from one of Isaiah's servant songs. He read it and then he announced that he was the one who the song was written for. The day began well enough, but then Jesus told the crowd that God didn't just care for the nation of Israel but for the Gentiles and the pagans as well. And at that news, the people were not happy. Jesus' first public message ended with a congregation literally trying to throw him off a cliff. In the middle of his public ministry he once told the religious rulers that he could set them free from slavery. That too didn't work out very well. In *John 8:31* it says: *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are the offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"*

This is an amazing answer. This is a stunning answer considering

that every Jew had to know that for 400 years they had been slaves in Egypt. Verse 34 it says: *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* The religious rulers end up by responding to his offer to end slavery by telling him first that he was crazy, then by telling him that he was illegitimate and then finally by picking up stones to stone him. Is it any wonder then that Jesus would say prophetically in this song of Isaiah: *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."* Frankly, many of us think it is a wonder because we don't expect that kind of response from Jesus. Sometimes I think we mistake Jesus for Superman or any other type of super hero. And God tells us that the very polishing process that he put Jesus through would be so that he would experience life like you and I experience it, warts and all. He was tempted as we are. Does it strike you as strange to imagine Jesus as frustrated, upset, and ready to throw in the towel? Well, consider the opposite option. Consider Jesus as Superman. You know, in spite of the blind, rebellious hatred that Jesus gets for his efforts, we like to think he just kind of shrugs his shoulders and keeps on going more like the Eveready bunny than a person of flesh and blood subject to all the struggles that you and I are subject to. But the fact is, there were times in Jesus' life and ministry when the

words of the servant song proved perfectly appropriate: *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."*

Most of these times occurred late in Jesus' ministry. Let me give you one. It had been three years that Jesus had been with his disciples. Jesus' time of departure is drawing near and they're growing anxious, they're growing fearful about this departure, so Jesus tells the disciples that they need to rest in him. In *John 14* it says this: *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."* Thomas said to him, *"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"*

Thomas had made a fundamental error here. You see, he thought Jesus was describing a place or a direction, a way, and he didn't know what that way was. Jesus emphatically corrects him in verse 6, he says: *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."* Now Jesus wasn't pointing to the

pathway to the Father. He was insisting that the way wasn't a place or a direction but was instead a person, a person who so mirrored the essence of the Father that to know him was to know the Father as well. He says, "*From now on you do know him and have seen him.*" Jesus was that person. You know, in essence what Jesus is saying is for crying out loud, Thomas, I've been with you for three years now. I've been among you demonstrating in the flesh the love and the compassion of the Father. But after Jesus tells Thomas that he was the way to the Father, Philip adds his own comment in verse 8. It says: *Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."* Those words were like a dagger. You see, Philip unintentionally demonstrated to Jesus that the last three years that he had spent revealing the Father had hardly begun to scratch the surface. All of the time that he had spent with Jesus and apparently it never occurred to Philip at all Jesus was trying to do exactly what Philip was failing to see; Jesus was showing Philip the Father. Who knows what it is that Philip and the rest of the disciples saw. We know that they heard Jesus insist over and over again that to know him was to know the Father and they had to have heard the words he had spoken to the religious leaders in the temple in *John 8:18* where he said: "*I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.*" They said to him therefore, "*Where is your father?*" Jesus answered, "*You know neither me nor my Father.*"

If you knew me, you would know my Father also." The disciples just didn't get it. They had seen him feed the 5,000, they had seen him heal the sick, they had seen him raise the dead, they'd also repeatedly heard him give testimony that all he had and did was by and through the Father.

In *Matthew 11:27* he said: *"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."* Well, Jesus had chosen to reveal the Father to these twelve. He told them in *Matthew 13:16*: *"But blessed are yours eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."* They saw it, and they heard it, and by and large it went in one ear and right out the other. You know, I somehow picture Jesus responding to Philip kind of like with his eyes closed and maybe he's got his hands locked behind his head, maybe he's got them on his forehead kind of like this, his tone is a mixture of sadness, frustration, and incredulity, and he says in verse 9, says: *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say 'Show us the father?'"* Is it any wonder then that the suffering servant would say: *"I've*

labored in vain; I've spent my strength for nothing and vanity."

Now that's not the only time also that the faithfulness of the disciples actually got to Jesus. Just like you and I, Jesus could go up to the mountaintop and then find himself once again at the bottom of the valley. In this particular case it was a literal and figurative mountaintop experience. Jesus is about to enter the final phase of his ministry with the final march toward the cross, and in Luke 9 he begins to just pour his heart out to his disciples. Chapter 9 opens up with Jesus' solemn declaration to the disciples. He says this in Luke 9:1-2, he says: *Summoning the twelve, he gave them power and authority over all the demons, and power to heal diseases. Then he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.* Picture what's going on here now. Jesus has spent three years living with and instructing his disciples. The cross is beginning to loom and Jesus is growing more and more explicit in explaining why he was here, and he engages the disciples by saying in Luke 9: *"Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back."* *"But you," He asked them, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "God's Messiah!" But He strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and*

scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day." Then he said to all of them, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it."

This is the level that Jesus is instructing his disciples in. It's heavy duty stuff. Peter correctly identifies him as God's Messiah. But as DA Carson points out, while Peter may have now understood that Jesus was the Messiah, he had no idea what the Messiah was here to do. Jesus tells them flat out that he is here for the purpose of dying and that they had to be prepared to take up their crosses as well. And Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John goes up to the mount of transfiguration where Jesus began to assume some of the glory that rightfully belonged to him before the foundation of the world. Mark 9:2-4 says this, it says: *After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves to be alone. He was transformed in front of them, and his clothes became dazzling -- extremely white as no launderer on earth could whiten them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Right then and there God the Father speaks from the cloud and he tells the disciples: "This is my beloved son. Listen to him."* An amazing thing takes place. Unfortunately all of this sets the stage for the fiasco that Jesus

finds when he returns from the mountaintop. Luke 9:37 says this:
On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus comes down from the mountaintop where he's just met with Moses and Elijah. He's the master who has left for the mountaintop only to return to discover that his students, his servants are not at all up to the task that he's left them with. He's now been with the disciples for years and his coming down from the mountain is reminiscent of Moses coming down from the mountain because both men find a faithless disaster. Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus came down from the mountain and as he comes down from the mountain, he encounters the other nine disciples and what are they doing? They're arguing with the scribes. In all likelihood the scribes are gloating over the fact that the disciples had failed at precisely the task that Jesus had given them: At casting out demons. And the crowd which Jesus had already identified as being primarily interested in food and magic, that crowd was in all likelihood responding like a circus crowd having viewed a failed magic trick. In describing Jesus' return from the mountaintop, Mark's gospel says this in *Mark 9:14: When*

they came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the scribes disputing with them. All of a sudden, when the whole crowd saw Him, they were amazed and ran to greet Him.

So here's the picture. The crowd is anticipating, the scribes are gloating, the disciples are arguing, the father of the demon possessed boy is begging, the son is dying, and the demon is still winning. This is what we call a fiasco. Is it any wonder then that in the servant song the servant would say: "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."

See, after three years of intense instruction, Jesus has clearly had it. We use words today like "epic failure" to describe what Jesus saw as he came down from the mountain, but Jesus, he's not responding at all to the embarrassment of this failure. John's gospel has already established the fact that Jesus, he didn't care what people thought. What he cared about is what this disaster implied. You see, the failure came at a time when Jesus had every right to expect that his disciples would begin to exercise the faith and the power that he has poured into them all these years, but instead of taking opportunity, instead of growing spiritually they have become dull and duller. Jesus leaves for the mountaintop, meets with Moses and Elijah reclaiming his glory and then he returns with Peter, James, and John only to find the crowd

still looking for him to put on a show, the religious leaders mocking the disciples' failed attempts at exorcism and the disciples themselves pitifully defeated by their lack of faith. And I would tell you in the New Testament, this is as close as we get to seeing Jesus flipping out. In *Luke 9:41* it says: Jesus replied, "*You unbelieving and rebellious generation! How long will I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.*" While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. You see, in spite of all the failure, in spite of all the disappointment Jesus encountered, there still was a demon that had to be dealt with and this demon had terrified the father, possessed the son and overwhelmed the disciples and yet Jesus dispatches the demon the way we might swat an insect. His complete and absolute authority was not lost on the crowd. In verse 43 it says: *And all were astonished at the majesty of God.* But as I said, Jesus wasn't interested in putting on a show for the crowd. He was still overwhelmed with his disciples' cluelessness. Verse 43 continues: *But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men."* I can't help but believe Jesus delivered those words with the same level of frustration that he delivered the other words with. You know, it's as if he was saying don't let

this incident distract from what I'm trying to say to you since so much of what I have to say to you goes in one ear and out the other. Please, please, *"Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men."* Jesus sounds almost desperate that they would understand that the cross is looming. But it was not to be. Listen to what verse 45 says: *But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.* They were afraid to ask I believe because it was painfully obvious that the master was very unhappy with them. But it gets worse. The very next verse, verse 46 says: *Then an argument started among them about who would be the greatest of them. "I have labored in vain; I've spent my strength for nothing and vanity."*

Jesus knew that the vast crowds that accompanied him were interested primarily in food and spectacle rather than the kingdom of God. After all, he told the crowds in *John 6:36*: *"But as I told you, you've seen Me, and yet you do not believe. Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will never cast out."* See, the disciples were called out of these crowds. The disciples were God's chosen men. Jesus said to his Father in his high priestly prayer in *John 17:6*: *"I have revealed Your name to the men You gave Me from the world. They were Yours,*

You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word." You see, because the disciples were chosen, because they were God's own and because Jesus loved them as his own, they had the unique capacity to cause him great pain and frustration. And that was never better illustrated than in our final incident when God's suffering servant was once again confronted with the utter vanity and hopelessness of communicating the depth of the gospel to his disciples. You know, there's no doubt that they belonged to Jesus by faith. But there was also no doubt that this faith was barely even mustard seed faith. Destined to grow, destined to prosper but during Christ's own earthly ministry, hopelessly small and ineffectual.

*This last incident takes place once again as Jesus draws even closer to the cross. It's very similar to the last conversation that Jesus had with Peter with one profound difference. Peter here identifies Christ as the Messiah but then he does something absolutely hideous. He blurts out a classic example of what James describes as demonic wisdom. This is from *Matthew 16:13-23*. It says: *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked his disciples, "Who do the people say the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah, still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," He asked them, "who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" And Jesus responded, "Simon son of**

Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven." And he gave the disciples orders to tell no one that he was the Messiah. From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "Oh, no, Lord! This will never happen to You!" But he turned and told Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me because you're not thinking about God's concerns, but man's."

See, Peter's greatest expression of spiritual wisdom came very shortly before he received the greatest possible personal rebuke from his Lord. Peter had just expressed a classic example of demonic wisdom, and it was all cast in the guise of deep concern and deep affection. You know, at first blush Peter's protest seems perfectly reasonable. I mean his Lord, his Christ has just told him he was going to suffer and die at the hands of the chief priests and the scribes. Peter seems to be saying what anyone would say upon hearing that his beloved master is facing

execution: *"Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"* Peter doesn't realize it but unwittingly he has become the dupe of the devil. Jesus' response identifies Peter's words as being exactly what James describes when he refers to false wisdom as earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. We know it was demonic because Jesus directly addressed the demon responsible and that was Satan himself. It was unspiritual because it was blind to the spirit world of the kingdom which fully understood that Christ had to come to conquer death by dying himself, that God is perfect, and that ever since the fall of man, ever since Adam fell, man himself is imperfect, fallen and flawed. That at the Christ -- at the cross, Jesus Christ came to offer his righteousness for our sin, and that alone is what makes us worthy to be worthy of heaven. Peter didn't realize it but if he had had his way, he would have passed an eternal death sentence on himself and all of the very creation that Jesus was coming to save. And finally, it was earthly because it was rooted in Peter's very fleshy desire to be part of the earthly kingdom that Christ would be the head of, and yet for all intents and purposes it appeared to be imminently reasonable and spiritually grounded in the love Peter had for his Savior. Jesus responds by saying, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me because you're not thinking about God's concerns, but man's."* Jesus is literally telling Peter get out of my sight. And worse still, he's not directing his comments at Peter but at

Satan who has directly infiltrated Peter's thinking. So after three years of intense personal training, the very person that Jesus has selected to lead his disciples has now become a source of confusion, frustration, and ultimately temptation. All of the meals, all of the miracles, all of the instruction, all of the personal example of God in the flesh had produced a group of disciples who had absolutely no idea who they were dealing with. Peter had inadvertently demonstrated that for all intents and purposes Jesus was facing exactly what the servant song of Isaiah had predicted what he would face: *"I have labored in vain; I spent my strength for nothing and vanity."*

Now, you can make the case that until the Holy Spirit had descended on the disciples, they had as much chance of understanding Jesus as you and I have without the Holy Spirit's power. I mean, Jesus had told them repeatedly that after he left, the Spirit would come and open their eyes and ears and their spiritual understanding. In *John 14:15* he said: *"If you love Me, you will keep My commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive Him because it doesn't see Him or know Him. But you do know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you."* And at verse 25 he said: *"I have spoken to these to you while I remain with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit -- the Father*

will send Him in My name -- will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you." We know, we know that after the Spirit came, the disciples caught fire. Their understanding was completed.

And so the question is were the disciples saved before the Holy Spirit came? Well, we thought that we are saved by grace through faith. We also know that the disciples had faith even though it was little, because Jesus after casting the demon out of the boy pointed out that their failure wasn't in having no faith but in having only little faith. In *Matthew 17:19* it says: *Then the disciples approached Jesus privately and said, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" "Because of your little faith," He told them. See, they had faith but it had not yet reached even the mustard seed size, and Jesus goes on to say to them: "For I assure you: If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting."* The disciples had failed at both badly and Jesus once again is left to pick up the pieces.

Philip ignores three years of Christ revealing the Father and says to Christ, *"Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us."* And the servant says: *"I've labored in vain; I've spent my strength*

for nothing and vanity." The disciples after being given the power to cast out demons turn a father's request for his demon-possessed son to be healed into a complete and total fiasco by their selfish ambition and lack of faith, and the servant says: *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."* Peter utters a demand of Jesus that is precisely what James tells us is worldly wisdom, earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Jesus has to address the leader of his disciples shortly before going to the cross as an unwitting hope and comfort to Satan rather than to himself. The servant says: *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."*

This raises the question why in the world would Isaiah's servant song, a song written hundreds of years before the event would take place, why would it focus on such a negative message? Well, the answer to that is actually simple. You see, Jesus had the solution to laboring in vain and spending his strength for nothing and it was in the very next verse in Isaiah. It says this, it says: *And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."* But I said, *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet -- and that's a pivotal word -- yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God."* You see, Jesus who did all things right also did right when it came to handling his frustration over us. Jesus was saying that

with the right end in goal and focus there is never a labor that is in vain. There is never a strength spent for nothing and vanity. Practically speaking, you and I represent Jesus Christ on this planet right here and right now, and each of us who attempts to bring the light of the gospel of Christ into the darkness of this present world, we're all going to feel that same frustration that Jesus felt with one very important difference. He was without sin. Bringing light into the darkness, we are all former members of that darkness. *1 Peter 2:9* says: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* See as those who are called out of darkness into the light, we operate in the same arena of spiritual hopelessness that Jesus did. And whether it's at work with your co-workers where they're having a laugh at your expense or maybe at home where you're trying mightily just like Jesus tried to get your children to fully understand the difference between being simply good, moral people and people who know they are sinners saved by grace, maybe you're having a conversation with a friend or even a stranger that's not going as well as it ought to. Maybe you're too frightened to even start that conversation. What God is telling us is what Jesus demonstrates to us is that with God and his pleasure

as our focus, instead of the results that we want, we are then freed from the need for perfect results. And there's no such thing as vain labor. *Isaiah 55* says it well, it says: "*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*"

Jesus understood how difficult and frustrating it was bringing light to those whose first love was the darkness, and it brought him to the place where he cried out: "*I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.*" We can easily get there too. But you see with Jesus as our guide, our model, and hope, we put our focus where he put his. We do that and we can't lose: "*Surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.*" Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you that Jesus lived life as we lived it, tempted in every way but without sin. And part of that temptation, part of that difficulty was the incredible frustration of dealing with people like us, of people who just didn't get it, over and over and over again, people who made a shambles of the

responsibilities and the privileges that they were given. Lord, that speaks to us, that speaks to every one of us, because we've all been there and we've all done that. Father, I thank you that you are a God who loves us in spite of us, that you are a God who in spite of the vanity, in spite of the emptiness, in spite of the apparent frustration was willing to just simply go forward, to simply teach, to simply do what you were called to do, knowing that it was pleasing to the Father. Lord, I pray that we would have the exact same motivation when we get to the frustrations that undermining us, that tempt us to say that it's all vanity, give us the ability to seek only to please you, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.