

Pastor Kenneth Mars
Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY
Lent V–Midweek (members of St. John’s Kimball also present)¹
March 25, 2015
Text: Isaiah 49:1–6

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

Tonight we bring our series, *Singing with the Exiles*, to a conclusion. Much has been said over these past weeks about Israel’s history of rebellion against God leading to their homeland being conquered, their Temple destroyed, and finally, their citizens being led away captives into Babylon. Looking at this sad history, one might conclude that God had abandoned His people. Such a conclusion would be a colossal mistake.

Was God disciplining His beloved people? Yes. Was the Lord of heaven and earth purging His people of their rebellion and inordinate pride? Most certainly. Was the Lord working His glorious plan of salvation for His people? Absolutely. Tonight’s reading from Isaiah 49 introduces us to what God the Father was doing all along in His dealings with Israel. In Isaiah 49 we learn of our greatest hope: the Servant of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 49:1–6 is often called the second Servant Song. The first Servant Song is found in Isaiah 42, the third in Isaiah 50, and the fourth and most famous of all is Isaiah 52–53, read each year on Good Friday. God’s discipline of Israel can only make sense if we understand that Jesus is the Servant of the Lord who brings ultimate salvation and victory for God’s people. Judgment and discipline provide the path to restoration and hope. It seems fitting that bring we this sermon series to a conclusion with a special emphasis on Jesus, the Servant of the Lord.

According to Isaiah 49:1, the Lord Jesus is called “from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.” I find it an amazing display of God’s providence that we read these words about Jesus’ incarnation on March 25. For today is also the Annunciation of Our Lord, the day we celebrate the angel Gabriel coming to the Virgin Mary to announce that she will give birth to Jesus, God’s Son. Nine months from today, we will celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Servant of the Lord.

¹ Adapted from the sermon Series “Singing with the Exiles” published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2015.

God's Son took on our human nature, our flesh and blood, when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. From that virgin womb, God's Son was called the Servant of the Lord and the Savior of the nations. And did not the angel Gabriel tell Mary what her Son's name was to be in accordance to Isaiah's prophecy? Yes indeed! Listen to Gabriel's words to Mary in light of Isaiah's second Servant Song, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31–33).

Isaiah 49:5 gives further description of Jesus' incarnation, "And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength..." There was never a time the Lord Jesus was not called by His Father to be the Servant and Savior of His people. This honor was given to the Son, to be our Savior from the exile of sin and death and eternal condemnation.

This Servant Son is described as being God's weapon to win His people's salvation. Isaiah 49:2–3, "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. And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'" Throughout Jesus' ministry we see the sharp sword of His teaching and preaching. Upon hearing His sermons, the people reacted with wonder and awe, "Who is this? For He preaches with authority, not as the scribes and Pharisees. And even the demons are subject to his word" (c.p. Mk 1).

By the power of His word, demons are silenced and cast out. A word is spoken, and the blind see, the lame walk, the diseased are delivered. By His Word, sinners are forgiven and brought back to the Father. Even creation is subject to the word of Jesus. The raging sea is stilled when Jesus commands, "Be silent." In response to Jesus' word, His disciples said, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him" (Mt. 8:27). Through His Word, Jesus takes 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish and multiplies it so that thousands are fed to the full. And yes, through His Word the dead are raised. The widow's son in Nain, Lazareth in Bethany. Jesus is the sharp sword of God's Word. He is the polished arrow that pierces through the demonic armor of sin, deception, and darkness.

When Jesus speaks, things happen. Whatever He says comes to pass. Take heart in this redeemed of the Lord. For what has He said of you? You are forgiven. You are cleansed, you are restored to God's family. You are loved for eternity. No one can take you out of My hands for you belong to Me.

That sharp sword and polished arrow of God's Word is also given to you for your use and protection. When faced with temptations and sins...speak the Word of the Lord. "O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise (Ps. 51:15). Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make hast to help me O Lord" (Ps. 70:1). Romans 6:11 is a mighty bulwark against sin, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

When the devil tempts you to think that you are beyond God's love and grace, speak Ephesians 2:4-8, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us... made us alive together with Christ...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith...it is the gift of God..." The greatness of God's Word and the glory of God's Servant are seen precisely in that He loves you and me, redeemed and forgiven sinners. So take your lies and filthy temptations away, O Devil, God the Father loves me and has saved me by His grace. And there's nothing you can do about it!

Isaiah tells us one more thing about the Servant of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep in mind, Isaiah is prophesying all this some 700 years before the birth of Jesus. And yet, he speaks with such clarity as if He were watching it all take place right before his eyes. God the Father is speaking in vs. 6 about His Servant Son, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

What an amazing statement! God the Father is working through Israel's rebellion, judgment, and restoration in order to bring about not only their own salvation but the salvation of the world! We see this universal work of grace early in the life of Jesus. Jewish shepherds worship the new born Jesus. Later, magi from the East worship Jesus. As an adult, Jesus not only heals Jews of every sort – male, female, young old, rich and poor – but he also heals non-Jews, people from the surrounding nations. Jesus healed a Roman centurion's servant (Mt. 8). The daughter of a Syrophenician woman was delivered from demon possession. Jesus preached in the Gentile regions

surrounding Israel (Mk 7). And during Holy Week, Greeks sought after Jesus to hear His teaching (Jn. 12).

The book of Acts reveals the preaching of Christ's Church beginning in Jerusalem, then going into Samaria, the nations around Israel, into Greece and Europe and eventually to Rome itself. Jesus is the Servant Son for all peoples of all times and places.

And what do I see before me this night but a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The Lord's salvation has reached Burns, Wyoming, Kimball, Nebraska and all the towns and villages in between. The light of the Lord has risen upon you. Isaiah's prophecy, spoken some 2,700 years ago, finds fulfillment in you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. That's worthy singing about. Glory be to Jesus, the Servant Son of God the Father almighty.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.