

# Portrait #2 A Redeeming Servant (Isaiah 49:1-7)

Portraits of Christ in Isaiah

6.13.18

## 1. Isaiah 49 begins with the voice of the Servant speaking.

A. This prophetic voice cries out to His people in the midst of their exile, their sin, and their shame.

1. The preceding chapters declare the fall of Babylon (Isa. 47) and the calling of Israel out of its exile and sin (Isa. 48).

2. Because Israel had previously trusted in idols, the Lord deals with them in such a way that the idols cannot receive credit for what God prepares to do (48:3-5).

**B. Isaiah 49 paints a beautiful portrait of the Redeeming nature of Isaiah's Servant that is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.**

1. Romans 5:8 declares that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us".

2. Just as the Servant proclaimed redemption to Israel in the middle of her exile, Christ declared our redemption and salvation in the midst of our sin and exile from God.

## 2. Exile and the People of God

A. Modern-day readers, especially in the West, have difficulty in grasping the heartache of exile.

1. Yet the theme of exile is critical for understanding Isaiah 49 and most of Scripture.

2. *The term exile conjures up social, political and religious images of judgment, captivity, banishment, displacement,*

*uprootedness, alienation and deportation. In the OT exile constitutes a major theme, weaving itself through almost every major account from Genesis to Malachi. It is so pervasive that the OT has on occasion been referred to as the foundational metanarrative of exile. Some of the more well known expressions of exile are found in stories such as Adam and Eve's banishment from the garden of Eden, Abraham's journey to the land of Canaan, Joseph's deportation to Egypt, Moses' wandering in the wilderness, David's escape from Saul's paranoia, and the most established of them all: Israel's exilic experiences in Assyria and Babylon. The theme of exile, however, does not function in isolation. In the two most important expressions for the study of the NT—the stories of Adam and Eve's banishment and the deportation of the Israelites to Babylon—exile, which is always a result of sin, is accompanied by the hope that God will liberate and restore. (Hatina 2000, 348).*

B. For Isaiah's readers, the threat of exile was real.

1. In fact, the horrors of exile would be upon them soon.
2. These horrors included nakedness, physical pain, loss of home and family, and much more.
3. And this memory of exile did not quit after Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed the exiles to return to Palestine. "During the Second Temple period, many in Palestine still considered themselves as being in exile because they were under foreign rule, which was an indication to the faithful that Yahweh had not yet returned to Zion (Ezra 9:8–9; Neh 9:36)" (Hatina 2000, 348).

C. Sin and exile are inextricably connected.

1. It was because of Israel's sin that she was led into exile.
2. It was because of sin that Babylon itself was judged and destroyed by Persia.

3. It was in the midst of Israel's sin that Isaiah proclaimed the salvation and redemption that the Servant of the Lord was to bring in Isaiah 49.

### 3. The Servant's Audience

A. Isaiah 49 begins with the Servant announcing the intended audience.

1. This message is not just a select few but to the islands and nations, representing the people of the world.

2. This message of hope and redemption is not limited to the people of Israel alone but to all people, wherever they may be found.

3. And the reason they should listen and "pay attention" (49:1, CSB) is due to the One who is doing the speaking.

B. The Servant speaks in these verses, declaring that it was the Lord that called him and that His ministry began before He was born (v.v. 1).

1. The Servant speaks in the prophetic and declares His source, His purpose, and His preparation.

2. The Servant acts and speaks as a prophet, using the Word of God as His weapon.

3. The imagery of verses 2 and 3 declares the "weapons" that the Servant will use.

a. He will not use the sharpened sword or the polished arrow like other kings and forces but will use the prophetic "word" to raise up kings and to bring down kingdoms.

b. The sharpness of the sword refers to its effectiveness and the smoothness of the arrow increases accuracy (Motyer 1996, 386).

c. The writer of Hebrews builds upon this theme in Hebrews 4:12 when he declares the word of God to be sharper than any "double-edged sword".

4. What Jesus, the Servant, declares comes to pass.
  - a. He does not waste words or speak for the sake of speaking.
  - b. When God speaks He speaks with purpose and with power.

C. Just as the Servant in Isaiah 49 told the "coasts and Islands" to listen, the Spirit is calling out to His people today as well.

1. I am firmly convinced that the Spirit of God wants to speak to us today.
2. How do we put ourselves in a position to listen?
  - a. By reading the Word of God.
  - b. By seeking God in prayer.
  - c. Times of fasting.
  - d. Times of worship.

#### 4. The Servant Israel

A. The focus of this portrait of the Servant in Isaiah refers to verse 3 when God declares "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

1. What is to be done with the use of this special name?
2. Alec Motyer (1996, 386) provides clarity and perspective on why God would call this servant "Israel":

*Israel was the name of an individual before it became a national name. At Bethel (Gn. 28:13f.; 35:9-15) Jacob received the name and with it the blessing and responsibility of the Abrahamic promises. At that moment the weight of the world rested on his shoulders. Isaiah brings us full circle back to such a moment as he penetrates the secrets of the Lord's age-long workings; the giving of the name to the Servant here 'surely reflects the prophets discovery that Israel in exile is not really capable at that moment of living up to what it means to be*

Israel'. The moment of discovery was 48:1-2; the evidence on which it rested, 48:3-8; and the discovery itself was somewhat more than Israel's incapacity to live up to an ideal, rather the forfeiture of all right to the name. In consequence, either the Lord must acquiesce in the failure of his plans and promises or else he must find a true and worthy Israel. The Servant is this wondrous new beginning.

B. God's people were certainly imperfect and sinful.

1. Israel was intended to be the example and light to the nations, bringing God glory and serving as a nation of priests yet their propensity for sin and rebellion destroyed their witness to the nations.
2. But God had a plan and raised up for Himself a perfect representation of Israel, Jesus.
3. The sinless and perfect Son of God became the example that Israel could not be.
4. Jesus became the perfect priest that would mediate for the sins of the world.
5. Jesus, the Servant prophesied about in Isaiah, would be the one to bring glory to the Lord.

C. We are a lot like Israel.

1. God gives us a task and a calling and all we do is mess it up.
2. When we should be worshipping the Lord, we are at other altars worshipping other gods.
3. When we should be clear representations of God's love and redemption, we mess it up with rules, traditions, and attitudes that nullify the Word of God.
4. This is why we need the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.
5. What we cannot do, the Holy Spirit can.

## 5. The Servant and Discouragement

A. The process of bringing God glory is not always easy.

1. As believers, we all are subject to weariness in doing what we know to be right and good.
2. We often feel like our work is not making a difference and if we are not careful we can grow despondent.
3. All of these temptations were experienced by the Servant.

B. Isaiah 49:4a has the Servant saying that his work in is vain and his strength is spent.

1. Did Jesus ever experience these feelings?

a. Yes. When Jesus was in the Garden, He battled with himself and yet committed himself to the will of the Father.

b. We often ignore the huge cost and burden placed upon Jesus to bear upon himself the sins of the world.

c. The physical, spiritual, and emotional battle He fought for redemption was real and if we leave Jesus upon the cross or in the Garden the picture of the Servant remains bleak.

2. But just as Jesus' passion and trial lasted but a season and culminated in a powerful resurrection, the Servant of Isaiah does not stay despondent either:

a. The last portion of verse 4 features the servant receiving His due and reward from the Lord's hand.

b. For believers today, if your sight remains on your labor, your suffering, or your pain then you will drift into despondency.

c. But when hope is placed in the Lord we realize that the outcomes are dependent upon God because our power comes from God.

C. If you have ever felt like giving up or overwhelmed you are in good company.

1. Moses,

2. Elijah,

3. Jeremiah

4. And every other saint has experienced moments and times of fear, weariness, and pain.

5. It is not wrong to experience these moments, but it is wrong to stay there.

6. The Servant wondered if His work was in vain, but He didn't stay wondering forever.

D. A key to avoiding discouragement is found in the dialogue of 3 and 4.

1. Vs. 3, "He (God) said to me...."

2. Vs. 4, "But I said..."

3. When you are discouraged and weary, remember the promises of God.

4. God's promises won't keep you from getting discouraged but they will keep you from staying there.

## 6. Discouragement doesn't last forever.

A. The Servant does not stay discouraged for long.

1. Isaiah 49:5-6 reminds of the calling this Servant has.

2. This calling has two connected facets:

a. First, the Servant was to restore the tribes of Jacob and Israel back to God.

b. Secondly, salvation and redemption shall be extended to the ends of the earth.

B. The restoration of Israel is the first mission of the Servant.

1. He is to redeem Israel from her exile and restore her back to God.
2. This echoes back to the opening statements of Isaiah 1:18 (NIV) "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."
3. This redemptive aspect of the Servant's ministry is repeated in verse 7, where the Lord reveals himself as the "Redeemer and Holy One of Israel".
  - a. To redeem means to buy at a great price in order to set prisoners or slaves free (Boice 1986, 325-326).
  - b. God declares Himself to be the Redeemer of Israel, the one who paid the price of her sin and is bringing her out of her bondage and exile.

C. But not only Israel; all of the world.

1. This mission to Israel is considered too small a thing for this Servant and so the mission is restored back to its Abrahamic beginnings that the whole world should experience the blessings of God through the chosen Servant, Israel.
2. Again the missional and compassionate heart of God is on display.
3. The same God who does not desire anyone to perish (Ezek. 33:11) is the same God who puts into motion a divine plan to redeem the world.

## 7. (Application) Jesus Redeems us From our Exile

- A. To experience exile is to experience separation and this portrait of the Servant in Isaiah powerfully prophesies of Jesus' ministry to the world today.
1. We, too, are lost in sin and experiencing the pain of our own exile.

2. Because of sin we experience the pain, shame, and separation that featured prominently in the exile of Israel.

3. And just like Israel, we have a redeemer who has come to give us life in the midst of our sin.

B. In antiquity, there were three ways people could become a slave:

1. There are those born into slavery, those that are slaves through military conquest, and those who are slaves because of debt.

2. All three depict our slavery to sin (Boice 1986, 327).

3. Fortunately, the ministry of the Servant frees us from all of these forms of slavery.

4. **No matter where you are, the Lord can find you.**

5. No matter what entangles you, Jesus can set you free.

6. No matter the gravity of sin, Jesus paid the gravest of prices.

7. For we are redeemed by the power and love of Jesus.

C. This is the second portrait of the Lord's Servant, Jesus.

1. He has come to us in our trespasses and sin and has overwhelmed the enemy by His word and power.

2. In the end, Isaiah 49:7 shall be enacted on the grandest scale as kings and princes bow down because of the faithfulness and power of God (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11).