

Christmas from Isaiah - Isaiah 4:1-16 - Jesus, gift of hope for the broken.

December 8, 2013

Good morning. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at Faith Church. I want to say hello to the Spencer campus. You guys rock. It is great to have you connecting via video.

This Christmas, we are in a brief series called *Christmas from Isaiah*. Last week, we learned a little about the book of Isaiah. Isaiah was written by one author, the prophet Isaiah. That doesn't sound profound until you realize the second half of the book is filled with specific details about events that would happen to the nation of Israel 100-250 years after Isaiah was dead and gone. I can't even figure out my schedule for the next week, and here is God giving details about events more than a hundred years into the future. That puts your horoscope and Nostradamus' prophecies to shame.

Last week, we also learned the second half of Isaiah has four passages that talk about a mysterious figure that God would one day send on the world scene. This mysterious figure is called "the servant of the Lord." This mysterious figure would change everything about the way we relate with God and one another. Who is he? Has he come? Last week we saw the New Testament is clear that this mysterious servant of the Lord in the book of Isaiah is Jesus.

Last week, we studied the first of these four passages in Isaiah about the mysterious servant. The first passage was found in Isaiah 42. We learned the servant of the Lord would change the broken vertical and horizontal relationships destroyed by sin in our world. This mysterious servant of the Lord will restore our

broken relationship with God, and he restores broken relationships with one another. If you have a broken marriage or a broken friendship, the only true healing you can find is with Jesus. Ultimately, in the new heavens and the new earth, Jesus will sweep all of sin's devastating effects of sin away from the relationships of life.

This morning, as we come to the next passage in Isaiah that talks about this mysterious servant of the Lord, we find he is hope when we are hopeless.

What happened between Isaiah 42 to Isaiah 49?

Before we look at Isaiah 49, let's take a little on ramp and find out what happened between Isaiah 42 to Isaiah 49, the passages we jumped over. If you skim through those chapters you find they talk about God delivering his people from captivity in Babylon. In the middle of these chapters, in Isaiah 44:28, God even named the great deliverer of his people from captivity, Cyrus, the Persian who conquered Babylon.

In Isaiah 49-55, the language and imagery of captivity and needing to be saved from it continues, but there are no more references to Babylon. There is still the need for a God-given deliverer, but Cyrus is never talked about.

There is a different kind of captivity talked about here. It is a captivity to sin that is the problem, and it is the servant of the Lord that sets people free.

God's servant is good news for the world.

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.
Isaiah 49:1 (ESV)

All of a sudden, we are no longer talking to just Israel. God wanted people from the farthest reaches of the Earth to hear him. God was sending a special baby. God even named him before he was born.

In the Bible, there were a few people God called and named to a particular task before they were born. Cyrus is an example. This baby was different. In a moment, we would see he had the task of saving people from all over the world. Cyrus didn't do that. The only person who could fit the bill in the history of the world is Jesus. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Bible tells us Jesus was called from the womb and named while in the womb by God.

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 (ESV)

God's servant is his secret weapon against sin.

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. Isaiah 49:2 (ESV)

The first thing we see is this servant's weapon was his words. His mouth was like a sharp sword. He was hidden in the shadow of God's hand. This servant wasn't obvious at first. In addition, he was like a polished arrow, hidden away in a quiver. I have a bow. I shoot a little archery. I know the slicker the arrow, the farther and the straighter it flies. The picture here is a guy who has a bunch of arrows in his quiver but when he needs to make a long shot, an accurate shot, and a lethal shot, he pulls out his polished arrow. This servant of the Lord is the Lord's secret and deadly weapon against sin.

Jesus will succeed where Israel failed.

And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” Isaiah 49:3 (ESV)

As I studied, when I came to this verse, I was confused. A little background helps explain this. The nation of Israel was originally intended by God to be his light to the nations of the world. It was intended by God to have a worldwide impact, and the nations would be drawn to Israel because they would see what it looked like to be ruled by God, and as they saw God’s rulership of Israel they would be drawn to God. The problem is the nation of Israel failed miserably. It was a huge fail blog. Instead of delighting in God, It delighted in sin. Instead of worshiping God, it worshipped idols of wood and iron. As a result, it went into captivity in Babylon.

In this verse God says the servant of the Lord would be a new Israel. It is saying the servant of the Lord would succeed in being a light to the world, where ancient Israel failed. What God would do is because of this servant’s complete trust and following of God. God would display his glory in him, or as the ESV footnote says, his beauty.

Think about this in terms of Jesus. He had a powerful ministry. His preaching and words drew crowds of thousands. God worked miracles through him. When Jesus came into Jerusalem for Passover, it seemed like the entire city came out to give him a red carpet welcome with palm branches. When we studied the Gospel of John, we learned the Triumphal Entry was a huge event.

Jesus' life of success ended in apparent failure.

We know the story in the New Testament. A life that looked like a raging success at the Triumphal Entry in the beginning of the week, looked like a complete tragedy by the end of the week when Jesus was rejected by the nation and crucified. We find the same thing scripted out in Isaiah written hundreds of years before.

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."
Isaiah 49:4 (ESV)

A life that looked like a success ended in apparent failure. I told you that as we studied these servant songs, we would get windows into Christ that we do not have in the Gospels. This is the servant of the Lord talking, and he was telling us his emotions as his world fell apart and the events of the crucifixion unfolded. I see an incredible sense of discouragement, maybe even depression, in Jesus as the people rejected him, the disciples abandoned him and three years of ministry apparently vaporized into nothing. When I read this, I realized Jesus understands what it feels to be discouraged and have your world fall apart. He understands how we feel when we pour our lives into something and it makes no difference. I love the way Jesus handled these feelings because it is so instructive for us and what we are to do in times when life falls apart. He turned those feelings over to God the Father and trusted his life into his father's hands, knowing that all that matters is what God the Father says about how he lived and how he suffered. God the Father is the final judge, not people around us. All that matters is what God the Father says about us when it is all said and done.

Some of you are facing hard times right now. You are planning on throwing in the towel with your marriages; you are discouraged because life is not turning out the way you planned. You have questions for God on why he is allowing your life to be taken and crushed. Don't turn away from God in those moments; like Jesus, trust your life into your heavenly father's hands more than ever, before knowing that what God the Father says about you is all that matters. Turn to him, and take your brokenness and pain and trust it into his hands, just like Jesus did.

You can see Jesus doing this on the cross when in his moments of brokenness before his death he cried out.

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Luke 23:46 (ESV)

God the Father was worthy of his servant's trust.

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— he says: "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." Isaiah 49:5–6 (ESV)

Now we move from Jesus' life, past his death to his resurrection. We find out that what looked like a failure in the world's eyes turned out to be exactly what God the Father wanted.

God the Father took Jesus and honored him. God the Father became Christ's strength and resurrection when all earthly strength was exhausted. God the Father was so pleased with his son that rather than Jesus just redeeming a

portion of Israel, God the Father put on a wide-angle lens and moved beyond Israel to bring salvation to people all around the world.

Interestingly, in Acts 13, when Paul and Barnabbas were in Antioch, they shared about Jesus with the Jews, but they were rejected. After the Jews rejected them, they turned to the Gentiles and started sharing with them about Jesus. To justify moving from the Jews to the Gentiles, they quoted Isaiah 49:6, confirming this is about Jesus.

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

“ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ” (*Isaiah 49:6*)

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:46–48 (ESV)

God will turn the servant who was despised into the servant who will be honored.

Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: “Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.” Isaiah 49:7 (ESV)

God spoke to his servant, the one who was rejected on Earth and rejected by the nation of Israel, and said there will be a great reversal. Kings will arise and fall down before you. Princes will fall down before you because God has chosen Jesus. I love this about God. He is the God of great reversals. Jesus who died was saved by God because of his trust in God. He was highly honored by God and became the king who reigns.

The book of Philippians tells us the same thing.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:8–11 (ESV)

Jesus frees those captives to sin from around the world.

Thus says the Lord: “In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages... Isaiah 49:8 (ESV)

Jesus’ original mission was to restore Israel. God said to Jesus, “Jesus, I did answer your prayer. I gave you as a covenant to the people.”

We saw this same thing last week in Isaiah 42. A covenant is like a lease. It defines the way two parties relate. The first covenant came on Mt. Sinai. It involved a temple, sacrifices, a priesthood, consistent blood and death. Here we see the servant of the Lord, who is Jesus, kept by God and given as a new covenant to the people. Jesus became the new way we relate to God, not based on what we do but on him being the new Israel that did not fail and did it all for us. The one who looked like a loser in the world turned out to be the Savior because his trust in God the Father saved him.

Now there is something interesting. We are going to read this next part of the song and the heading in your Bible probably says “The Restoration of Israel.” When you read this, you think about the nation of Israel. It sounds like we are going back to Israel being released from Babylonian captivity. Captivity in Babylon is not mentioned. Cyrus was no longer the liberator. Using the language of the Exodus of God’s people from Egypt, Isaiah described another

exodus of God's people. This exodus was led by the servant of the Lord, not from Babylon but from the four corners of the earth. This servant of the Lord, is the new Moses, leading people out of captivity to gather around the throne of God in the heavenly Jerusalem. As I read this, keep that in mind.

Thus says the Lord: "In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, 'Come out,' to those who are in darkness, 'Appear.' They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene." Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted. Isaiah 49:8–13 (ESV)

Syene is sometimes translated Aswan, which is in southern Egypt. Some of your translations have Syene, which scholars think is an area of China. The point is Jesus was now appointed by God to lead a new exodus of God's people from all corners of the world to a new promised land called the heavenly Jerusalem.

I will admit that sounds sketched sketchy to me. I see the language of the Exodus here. I see the captives coming from all over the Earth and not just Babylon, but is this really Jesus leading his people home to heaven?

During my study, late in the week I ran across Revelation 7 which talks about a great multitude from every nation that are gathered around the throne of God who have been led by Jesus, the Lamb of God. Revelation 7 quotes Isaiah 49 to describe how the Lamb of God led them to heaven.

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Revelation 7:16–17 (ESV)

What does God want us to gain from this?

1. **Jesus suffered and felt defeated on Earth but placed his trust in God and was richly rewarded by God for it.** If you are suffering and in hard times, in your brokenness place your trust in God the Father; all that matters is not that you suffered but that you suffered well in the eyes of God the Father by placing your trust completely in him, just like Jesus did in his hours of despair. If God the Father was worth Jesus trusting in the middle of his suffering, he is worth us trusting in our suffering.
2. **God loves great reversals.** The servant of the Lord who looked ultimately defeated and mocked by the nations turned into the one who the kings will bow down to. Some of us see no hope for the future. We see no hope for our marriages. We see no hope for our finances. We see no hope for our jobs. Turn to God and place your trust in him. He loves great reversals where he gets all the credit.

What should I do when I know the truth of Jesus but still feel abandoned by God?

I want to talk to those of you here this morning that are deeply broken. Just as God saved Jesus in the midst of his brokenness, God will save you in the midst of your brokenness; you can trust him. This is an incredible promise of hope for those who feel hopeless this morning. You read about God saving Jesus, and through Jesus, God saving you, but you look at your life right now

and life is hard. You don't see it. You don't feel it. Why doesn't God come to your rescue right now? If we keep reading, we find the answer because that is just the way the nation of Israel felt when it was in captivity reading this.

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Isaiah 49:14 (ESV)

Let me show you what God said to Israel and what he says to us when we feel abandoned and forgotten.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." Isaiah 49:15 (ESV)

They say one of the strongest bonds that can be created is between a mother and her child. Guys, if you are married, you know you are No. 1 in your wife's life until she has a baby, then you become No. 2. Nothing gets between a mother and her child. When a woman nurses, her body releases hormones that move beyond emotional to chemical in nature. Her body releases oxytocin and prolactin. That fiercely bonds a mother to her children.

The problem is that as close as that bond is between a mother and her nursing child, some mothers are still bad moms. They are harsh to their children. They forget about their children. They abandon their children. God says, "I am not like that. I will not forget about you." God says, "No matter what it looks like in your life right now, I'm not like a bad mother. I haven't forgotten you. No matter what it looks like and no matter what it feels like, I am there for you."

Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands... Isaiah 49:16 (ESV)

God says, "Listen to me. I love you so much I tattooed your name on the palms of my hands." The palms of our hands are the place we see most often on our bodies. "I put you in a place that I will never, ever forget you, no matter what it feels like, I have not forgotten. You are tattooed on me."

It gets more interesting because the Hebrew doesn't say tattooed, it actually says "engraved" into the hand. The Hebrew means our names are literally chiseled into the hands of God with a spike and a hammer. The picture is that out of love for you, someone has taken a hammer and a spike and driven the spike into the palms of God's hands. When the spikes were being driven into the hands of Jesus as he was nailed to the cross, that was Jesus' way of tattooing our names into his hands. Even in his resurrected body, the engraving of the spikes are still in the hands of Jesus, the son of God. No matter how messed up things look, no matter how much you think God has abandoned you, he hasn't. Our names are chiseled into his hands forever. Jesus felt abandoned and hopeless, but he wasn't; he could trust his life into his father's hands, and we can do the same when life is falling apart. Jesus is our hope when we are hopeless.



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