

In the Gospel for today, John the Baptist said, “Look, The Lamb of God!” (John 1:29, 35). Older translation said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” John wanted to direct our attention to Jesus. Isaiah wants to do that too. But Isaiah uses a different name for Jesus. Isaiah calls Jesus, “the Servant of the LORD.” In effect, Isaiah says, “Behold, the Servant of the LORD!” And as we direct our attention to the Servant of the LORD today we will see three things about him. We will see that God called him. God sustained him. And God brings salvation through him. So our theme today is:

- “Behold the Servant of the Lord!”
- I. God called him.
 - II. God sustained him.
 - III. God brings salvation through him.

The first thing we notice when we direct our attention to the Servant of the LORD is that God called him. In this prophecy Jesus is speaking and he says, **“Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: before I was born the LORD called me” (Isaiah 49:1)**. Our passage mentions some of the things that Jesus was called to do. First, God called Jesus to speak God’s Word. Jesus says, **“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword” (49:2)**. Since it mentions Jesus’ mouth, the focus here is on the words Jesus says. **“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword” (49:2)**. The book of Hebrews it says that the word of God is **“sharper than any double edged sword” (Hebrews 4:16)**. The Word of God needs to be sharp like a sword because it needs to cut through thick darkness. Isaiah said that **“darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples” (Isaiah 60:2)**. This darkness needs to be pierced with words because this darkness is not a physical darkness. This darkness is a way of thinking and an attitude of the heart. The Bible says that the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law nor can it do so. To cut through darkness like that we need words with God’s power. We need words to pierce our darkness and cause us to repent of our sinful thinking and behavior. We need words to pierce our darkness and assure us of God’s love and forgiveness. Jesus was called to pierce our darkness with his words. **“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword” (49:2)** Another thing Jesus was called to do was to be what some have called the ideal Israel.¹ Our passage says, **“He (that is God the Father) said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor’ (49:3)**. Usually “Israel” refers to the nation as a whole. But here Jesus is called **“Israel.”** Why? Well, God’s people are called to give God glory with all their thoughts, words and actions. But, sadly, we don’t always bring God glory with our thoughts, words, and actions. When Christians use filthy language, when Christians are mean, when Christians engage in immoral behavior, that does not bring God glory. Instead those things dishonor God’s name. When Christians sin we are failing in what we have been called to do, that is: bring God glory in our thoughts, words and actions. But God said to Jesus, **“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor” (49:3)**. Jesus is the ideal Israelite. He perfectly gave God glory in everything he said, thought and did. This means two things for us. First, since Jesus was in our place, his perfect obedience counts for us. When God looks at you, he sees Jesus. Second, since he is the ideal Israelite, we are being conformed to his image so that we more and more serve God like he did.

So when we direct our attention to the Servant of the Lord, the first thing we see is that God called him. God called him to speak God’s Word. He made his mouth like a sharpened sword. And God called him to be the ideal Israelite. God said, **“You are my servant Israel in whom I will display my splendor.** God called him. The second thing we see about the Servant of the LORD is that God sustained him. When Jesus went about his ministry of speaking God’s word, many rejected him. Jesus says, **“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all” (49:4)**. This shows the depth of the rejection that Jesus went through. Many

¹ I owe this term to John Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

people despised Jesus. Later it says, **“To the one who was despised and abhorred by the nation” (49:7)**. You can think of the crowd shouting, **“Crucify him, crucify him”!** This is God’s exalted Servant, and yet many are rejecting him. And yet Jesus lost his faith. He says, **“Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand, and my reward is with my God” (49:4)**. Even when he was in the depths of humiliation, he trusted in God. He says, **“My God has been my strength” (49:5)**. Even through his rejection and his suffering Jesus held on to his God. And God sustained him.

And then God exalted him by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. The apostle Paul says that **“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** (Philippians 2:9-11). It’s like it says in our passage. **“This is what the LORD says, ‘Kings will see you and stand up’” (49:7)**. Usually people stand in the presence of the king, but here the kings stand when they are in the presence of the King of kings. **“Princes will see you and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (Isaiah 49:7)**.

On lesson we can learn from this is to not lose our faith in God even when we face rejection and suffering. God exalted Jesus and he will exalt us with Jesus. So the second thing we see about the servant of the LORD is that God sustained him when he was rejected. He said, **“My God has been my strength” (49:5)**. The third thing we see when behold the Servant of the LORD is that God brings salvation through him. Jesus says, **“And now the LORD says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself” (49:5)**. During his earthly ministry Jesus ministered mainly to the Jewish people. The Bible says that the Gospel is **“first for the Jew” (Romans 1:16)**. And though most rejected him, there were some who believed in him and there are some Jews who believe in him today. Jesus gathered the lost sheep of Israel to God.

But God’s plan all along was that Jesus would be the also Savior for the Gentiles, non-Jews. The Bible says that the Gospel is **“first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom 1:16)**. You see God had huge plans for his Servant Jesus. God said to Jesus, **“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept, I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (49:6)**. God had huge plans for his Servant Jesus. Through his Servant Jesus God solved humanity’s biggest problems. He says, **“that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (49:6)**.

The word **“salvation”** implies that we need to be rescued from something. We needed to be rescued from sin. The Bible says that because of our sins we were by nature objects of wrath. Because of our sins we deserve God’s wrath in hell. And we don’t have just a little bit of sin. We have a lot of it. Who is going to take all of that sin away? John the Baptist points to Jesus and says, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 35)**. God had big plans for his Servant. He took away the sin of the world. And God promises that everyone who believes in him, has the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven. God had big plans for his Servant. Those plans included that Jesus would defeat death. When Jesus came God pulled the arrow out of his quiver that would defeat death. Nobody thought death could be beaten but then the tomb was empty on Easter Sunday morning. The book of 1 Timothy says that Jesus Christ has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

God had big plans for his Servant. Those plans included sending missionaries into the world so that you and I also would behold the Servant of the LORD and have the light of his salvation. **“I will make you a light for the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”** (Isaiah 49:6). John the Baptist said **“Behold the Lamb of God.”** If we put that in Isaiah’s terms, Isaiah says in effect **“Behold the Servant of the LORD. God called him to speak the word to us and live a perfect life in our place. God sustained him when most rejected him. God worked salvation through him and brought that salvation to us. Behold the Servant of the LORD. He is our Light and our Salvation. Amen.**