

Isaiah 49 - The Servant's Redemption

The first Servant Song (Isaiah 42.1-9) concerns the character of the Lord Jesus. The second Song emphasises His work of redemption. Note also that Isaiah 42 is the Servant's biography, whereas Isaiah 49 is His autobiography.

Context

In Isaiah 40-48, King Cyrus is the prominent figure as God's instrument of salvation to effect Israel's return from exile in Babylon. Now in Isaiah 49-57, the Divine Servant comes to prominence as the One who will make salvation available, not just to Israel, but also to the world (cf. v.6). This is very likely the song that was in Simeon's mind (Luke 2.32) when he saw and worshipped the Lord Jesus in the temple at Jerusalem.

Note the structure of the Song. In vv.1-6 the Servant Himself speaks, whilst in vv.7-13 the Father speaks of His Servant (although in vv.1-6 the Servant also quotes that which the Father has stated concerning Him). A simple division of these six verses could be:

Section	Words of...	Subject
Isaiah 49.1	The Servant	His Calling
Isaiah 49.2	The Servant	His Communication and Concealment
Isaiah 49.3	The Father	His Character
Isaiah 49.4	The Servant	His Confidence
Isaiah 49.5-6	The Father	His Commission

His Calling

1 ¶ Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people (nations), from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother (this must be an individual!) hath he made mention of my name (or, 'caused by name to be remembered').

This verse tells us that the Lord Jesus was called for and separated unto a specific work from birth (cf. Jeremiah 1.5, Galatians 1.15). **This is a calling to service (v.3, cf. Philippians 2.7)!!** This includes bringing glory to God (v.3), restoring the nation of Israel (v.5) and making salvation available for all (v.6). *Note that the Lord Jesus is given great authority as His calling is from the LORD (Matthew 28.18).*

As Christians we have experienced the call of God in the gospel. Very often the word "called" in the NT when applied to a believer has the idea of being 'called out' (Romans 8.30). We have been 'called out' of the world to serve Him (1 Corinthians 7.22). We have been called out of darkness (1 Peter 2.9) unto the fellowship of His Son (1 Corinthians 1.9), to peace (1 Corinthians 7.15), to liberty (Galatians 5.13), to glory and eternal life (1 Thessalonians 2.12, 1 Timothy 6.12), to purity (1 Thessalonians 4.7), to suffering (1 Peter 2.21). What a high calling this is. We must ensure that we live lives which are worthy of this calling (Ephesians 4.1).

Given the authority He has and who He is, the Lord Jesus calls the 'world in all its extent' ("isles") to **listen** to Him. We are not only to listen, i.e. hear His voice, but also to "hearken" which is to 'attentively give ear to what is proclaimed' with a view to obedience. Are we listening to the voice of the Lord Jesus? Better still are we obeying what He has to say (James 1.22-24).

"from the bowels of my mother". Scripture pays particular care to emphasise the mother of the Lord Jesus (cf. Genesis 3.15, Psalm 22.10, Isaiah 7.14) but there is no mention of His father. From the "bowels" (literally, 'the inward parts') or immediately from birth the LORD has sought to 'bring into people's minds', 'announce', 'declare' and 'proclaim', the name of Christ, i.e. glorify His Person, His office and His calling. God is shouting about Him! Wasn't this true at His birth (Luke 2)? There may also be a reference here to the personal Name of the Servant, "Jesus". This was a name revealed only at the time of His birth and not before (Matthew 1.21).

His Communication and Concealment

2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished (pure, choice, proven) shaft (arrow); in his quiver hath he hid me.

When the Divine Servant speaks, His words are like a "sharp sword". This indicates that the things He says are piercing and powerful, cutting directly to the heart (John 7.46, Luke 4.22, Matthew 12, Hebrews 4.12, cf. Isaiah 50.4-5). The

sword in connection with the mouth is also connected with Messiah's work of judgment (Isaiah 11.4, Revelation 19.15). Divine Persons have chosen to display their power by speaking. We must never underestimate the power of the written and spoken Word of God.

"and made me a polished shaft". Note that the emphasis here is on the Servant Himself who is made the pure arrow, not His mouth. He is a 'pure', 'choice', 'free from rust' arrow. The idea is that the arrow is rubbed free from roughness or unevenness which might deflect its flight and it is therefore highly accurate. Christ Himself pierced the hearts of men by His very Person and character. On occasions there was not even any need to speak (Luke 22.61, Revelation 1.17). Arrows also speak of deliverance (2 Kings 13.17). The Lord Jesus is God's choice, proven, pure arrow of deliverance for God's people.

"hid". Both the sword and the arrow are hidden. This speaks of concealment and protection. The Lord Jesus has always existed, but at just the right moment, He was revealed in this scene (Galatians 4.4). There is also the indication of Divine protection (Matthew 2.13, Luke 1.35, 4.29-30, John 2.4) and care ("shadow of his hand"). Praise God our lives are hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3).

His Character (Brings Glory to God)

3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

Essentially, this is the calling of v.1. Christ is called to be a Servant, namely Israel. The name Israel can refer, in its widest sense, to the nation as a whole (saved and unsaved). In its narrower sense it includes only the saved of Israel (Isaiah 51.7, 65.10). Here it is more restricted again and represents an individual, namely the Lord Jesus, the One in whom God's purposes for Israel will be fully realised (Hosea 11.1, Matthew 2.15). God chose the nation of Israel so He might work out His purposes through them. They were to bring great glory (Isaiah 43.7) and honour to Him, but they **failed**. They were not walking worthy of their calling (Isaiah 48.1-8). Praise God, a true and worthy Israel has been found! Christ is the One who will fully and completely glorify God (John 13.31-32, 14.13, 17.4). The Lord Jesus has 'beautified' God and 'displayed' His 'splendour'.

His Confidence

4 Then I (in contrast) said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain (i.e. to no purpose): yet surely (nevertheless) my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

One of the aspects of the Divine Servant's work is to 'bring again' (v.5), 'gather' (v.5), 'raise' (v.6) and 'restore' (v.6) "Jacob". In this respect He 'toiled to exhaustion' ("laboured in vain") and poured out His strength but with seeming fruitlessness. During His first advent the nation was not gathered, raised or restored (cf. Mark 8.21, Luke 9.41, 13.34). Has then the Divine Servant failed? NO! Rather He leaves His justification ("judgment") and "work" with the LORD. He has **confidence** in Him. In a coming day, the mighty results of the Servant's work will be fully seen (v.6) as He is honoured (v.5) and worshipped (v.7).

Despite the apparent failure of the Divine Servant's work, did He change His course? Did He try more popular methods as advocated by Peter (Matthew 16.22)? NO!! He did not seek outward applause or success, but to do the will of God (Isaiah 50.5-7). We too should be faithful in obeying the Word of God and leave the increase to Him (Galatians 6.9).

His Commission

5 And now, saith the LORD [that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring (back) Jacob again to him, (Though Israel is not (yet) gathered, Yet I am honoured in the eyes of Jehovah, And my God hath been my strength.)] YLT

6 It is a light (small, insignificant) thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel (the remnant): I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

What is the Father's response to His Servant's labours? **He is glorious ("honoured")**. That is, He is 'worthy'. The Father declares that He has fully displayed the splendour of the presence and character of God (the Shekinah Glory!). All this has been achieved by Christ in total dependence upon His Father ("God has been my strength").

As a result, His toil will be immeasurably fruitful: *"The object of Christ's work was to gather Israel unto Himself. "Jacob" has wandered away from God, but His Servant has been sent to "bring" (turn) him back with the assurance of a welcome. Not only has "Jacob" wandered like lost sheep and need gathering, but they have fallen so low into sin (v.6) and Christ will "raise" (v.6) them up. Even the "preserved" remnant of Israel is lost spiritually and He is sent to restore them to fellowship with God and the land."*

However, this is a 'small' thing. In virtue of His finished work, Christ will also turn Gentiles from darkness to Himself (The Light) and make salvation available to the "end of the earth". Hallelujah, what a Saviour!