

Isaiah 49:1-13

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[0 : 00] Matt is a staff pastor at Trinity in New Haven, which helped to plant Shoreline in 2015.

! Matt, how long have you been at Trinity as a pastor?! It's really good to be with you all this morning.

It's been a joy to see God at work in this church. When some of these guys showed up at Trinity back in 2010, no one could imagine that this would be where God would take it.

So it's been pretty fun to see and be able to be a part of the Shoreline Church from afar, and I'm glad to be able to come and serve you this morning.

So, you know, as I begin this morning, one of the things that seems to be true in our country is that it is shifting.

[1 : 31] It is shifting from a country that has been viewed as a Christian nation to a pluralistic nation. This is a sociological reality. The percentage of Christians in America is decreasing.

The incidence of people attending church is decreasing in our world. I say this, however, also just wanting to personally, there are some who are mourning the loss of a Christian America, and I do want to sort of poke that bubble a little bit this morning as we start by saying that I think it's a little bit of a myth.

When I was a university student, I did an investigation into American church history, and particularly American Christianity at universities. And what I realized is that if you go back and you look at it in the 1790s, in the 1820s and 30s, people were lamenting the loss of Christian virtue, the Christian morality.

And the reality is that there has always been an ebb and flow in the reality of our country. So let's not be too nostalgic about it. Even if our longing for our country to be a certain thing would be a good one, let's not be too nostalgic about the past.

However we read that past narrative and that story, what we do find today, though, is that we have more and more neighbors who practice other beliefs than Christianity.

[3 : 00] Maybe some of you this morning have come exploring Christianity, and that's been true of you, that you've believed other things. We're glad that you're here this morning. We face plurality in its reality in a much more everyday level.

And the question that often raises in our minds is this. When my neighbor, who's a good neighbor, they mow their lawn, they put out their trash, you know, when they believe something really different, how does that affect me?

How does that affect my understanding of Christianity? How does that affect my understanding of who God is when they seem like they're good people, but they actually believe something really different than me?

And when we dig down underneath that question, there's a very important question that our passage this morning is going to address.

And that is this question. Is Christianity, is the God of the Bible, just one of many gods? Is he the capital G God, or is he just one option for us to consider?

[4 : 04] This is a question that's been happening, that has been a challenge for God's people throughout the Bible. If you know the story of the Bible, you can go back to the Old Testament.

God's people had lived among the Egyptians and the Egyptians who worshiped other gods. When God redeemed them out of Egypt and brought them into a promised land, they brought, they came into Canaan where there were lots of other gods who were being worshipped in that land.

And they fell into idolatry at times. Maybe these other gods are better than the God of the Bible. As we move along in the history of Israel, we realize that Israel faced a great challenge when the northern kingdom, the 10 tribes in the northern kingdom fell to the kingdom of Assyria and the gods

that they worshipped.

And then in 586 BC, Jerusalem itself fell. And in a world where most people believed that the God who was the best God was also the God who always won the military battles, it created a crisis. Maybe the Babylonian gods are better than mine. So this question has been raised throughout the Bible even of, is our God only a small g God?

[5 : 28] This leads me to Isaiah. I know you guys have been studying John. So this is going to be a shifting gears, a different genre, a slightly different voice of the Bible.

But I hope it will be a blessing to us this morning. We're going to look at Isaiah chapter 49. If you want to turn there, remember Isaiah prophesied back in the 700s BC during that crisis time when Assyria came and invaded and took over the northern kingdom.

He spoke a lot to the present situation and the challenges of faith and holding on to God in the middle of these political pressures. Chapters 1 through 39 is all about that.

Then it seems that in chapter 40, Isaiah shifts gears. And instead of talking about the present situation, he begins to look ahead. He begins to look ahead in chapters 40 through 55 with a word of hope to the people who would end up going into exile in Babylon until he's speaking to them. And that's where we are in Isaiah 49. We're in that section. And he's speaking words of hope about God who will send a redeemer for his people.

[6 : 43] And he's talked about redemption throughout this whole time. But in chapter 40 through 48, the redemption has been political primarily. It's actually talked about Cyrus the Persian and how God's going to use this other pagan king to come and defeat the pagan king that they're under and redeem them politically.

But in chapter 49, where we start to, Isaiah turns his voice away. The redemption they pictures in this passage is not primarily political, but it's spiritual.

One who's going to bring a greater redemption than the redemption that we've had. So, this will answer the question, is God just a small g God?

Let's read it together, let's pray, and then we'll explore it together, okay? Isaiah chapter 49, starting in verse 1. 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. He made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand, he hid me.

[7 : 54] He made me like 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.

But I said, I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing in vanity. And surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God.

And now, the Lord says, He who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and 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, to bring back the preserved of Israel.

I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. 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.

[9 : 17] Thus says the Lord, In a time of favor I have answered you, and in a time 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 and to those who are in darkness appear.

They shall feed along the ways, on the 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.

Let's pray for God's help in understanding this passage today. Lord, we thank you for this passage, and we pray this morning that you would be with us, that your spirit would open our eyes to see the truth that is here.

[10:32] Lord, that your spirit would open our hearts. Lord, that we would receive this truth, and that you would move our wills, Lord, to act in response to it.

God, we pray that as we do this, Lord, you would lead us to see what a great God you are. We pray this morning in Jesus' name. Amen.

So why is the God of the Bible not only a small g God? Because God has sent a servant to be a redeemer, a unique one unlike all others.

And what we're going to do this morning is look at this, because what this passage is about is this servant redeemer that God is sending. And this servant redeemer is going to do three things. If you're note takers, if you like outlines, here it is for you.

Verses 1 through 4, the servant redeemer displays the beautiful glory of God. Verses 5 through 7, the servant redeemer is exalted to be a light to the whole world.

[11:34] Verses 8 through 13, the servant redeemer secures his people for his praise. Okay. We'll get those again. So the first one, verses 1 through 4, the servant redeemer displays the beautiful glory of God.

When we're reading this passage, it's a prophecy and it's always challenging because the voices change. Have you noticed that? Like who is speaking changes throughout the passage. We want to identify that. In verses 1 through 4, there's a dialogue between the servant or the prophet and God himself.

And the key verse here is in verse 3. Look with me in verse 3. He says, And he said to me, that is God said to this servant, You are my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

Who is this servant? Well, he calls him Israel, but it seems that it's not what the people expected, right? Because at one level, when he calls it Israel, we think, Oh, maybe this is Israel the nation.

But no, as you look further on, it can't be a nation because the way he talks about it, he highly personalizes it. It's a person. Verses 1 and 4 show that in particular, that it's a person.

[12:49] And it's not just a person, but it's also not the kind of person we would expect. Because in the Old Testament, what they were expecting was a king who would raise up an army, right?

They're expecting someone who's going to come in and defeat the political powers that are creating the oppression of God's people. But this servant is instead, well, a servant.

This is where he starts. He doesn't come as a king riding on a horse. He comes and says, I'm going to give myself for others. And we know, because one of the most famous chapters in the whole Bible is Isaiah 53, that further on, this servant will be one who will suffer for his people, who will die in their place for their redemption.

And this is the servant that God raises up in this, right? And he has a purpose, right? The one in whom I will display my glory, right?

Now, if you have an ESV, you might have a translation footnote at the bottom that says, the one who will display my glory, or maybe my beauty, is what the ESV footnote says.

[14:06] And maybe you're wondering, okay, what is splendor? Here's a word for you, splendor.

And God is saying, this servant is someone in whom I'm going to display my splendor. How many people have been to the Rocky Mountains, Estes National Park?

Okay, if you've lived like we have on the East Coast, we've seen the hills, right? And they call them mountains. And then you go to the Rockies, and you drive up into that valley in Estes Park, and there's a big lake with the town around it, and you look up, and you are surrounded by the splendor of mountains.

Real mountains with glory and snow-capped peaks and tree lines. And it's breathtaking if you've never seen it, right?

And this is what splendor is. The splendor of something is the characteristics that are on display and then evoke from us, wow, this is something valuable, treasured, beautiful, glorious.

And what God is saying is that this servant that He is sending is going to be the place where we can look to say, wow, this is what God is like.

[15:19] We learn a few things about Him. Verse 2 says that He will come with a sword in His mouth, which doesn't mean... That's just a weird picture. What does it mean? It means He's going to come speaking words, not wielding a sword, not wielding a sword.

Gentiles who have received the light from God through this servant.

And this has been the purpose that God has always had for us. This light that comes brings clarity, illuminating truth, helping us see what we grasp for and can't find on our own, bringing life, bringing the warmth and the light of his love so that we might have life in him in this world, bringing hope in the darkness and despair that we experience on a regular basis in a fallen world.

He says that he will come to deeply despised, abhorred by nations, the servant of rulers. And this one he will raise up in such a way that this light will go to the whole world, such that kings and princes will bow down before this one at the end.

The one who seems lowly, the one who seems rejected, he in the end will be worshipped by all the power brokers, by all the leaders of this world.

[22 : 54] Friends, again, the Gospel of John helps illuminate what this is. Chapter 1, he says, Friends, recognize that this is all.

Friends, recognize that this has always been true of the Bible.

It is not like the Old Testament is this part of the Bible that's only about the Jewish nation, and then God kind of said, Oh, well, that didn't work. Maybe we'll do something new and start again with the New Testament.

Going all the way back to the covenant of Abraham in Genesis 12. Not only will I bless you and make you a nation, but I will bless all the nations of the world through you.

Right? The promise of the new covenant people in Jeremiah, where he says, I will make a new people whose hearts will be not stone but flesh anymore.

[24 : 10] Here in Isaiah, we see this. Here in Psalm 67, you see this purpose that God has always seen Israel as a vehicle of displaying his glory to the whole world.

And when Jesus comes, he fulfills this and he says, I have come for the whole world that they may know me. So the blessing to the nations comes through this servant.

The light of the world comes to a whole world in darkness. And he comes to all who received him. Not just those of us who grew up in Christian homes or in Christendom or Christian families, but to everyone.

Regardless of your background, regardless of the religion of your parents, regardless of your national culture. Jesus comes to all of us and he says, I have come to be a light for all peoples.

If God's servant will display his glory to the whole earth, then what does he want? What does he want to do? Verses eight through 13, as Isaiah closes this section, he says, the servant redeemer will come to secure his people for his praise.

[25 : 31] Look at me at verse eight for a second. This is such an interesting verse. Thus says the Lord in a time of favor, I have answered you in the 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.

God says, I will come and make a new covenant with my people. But do you see what it is, right? The old covenant, it was, I will be your God. You will be my people. If you will obey my commands and do what I've called you to, right?

This is what Exodus was all about, right? God comes here and he says, I'm going to make you my servant, a covenant with my people.

So they no longer, because we know in our sin, none of us will be able to keep a covenant with God because we're imperfect people and we will fail. But what God has done is he has made a covenant with his servant and the servant Jesus would come and he would be the one who would secure our relationship to Jesus.

And so the servant is the covenant, right? And he says, and I'm going to come and this is what it's going to look like for you to live in the covenant. This is what verses 9 through 12 is.

[26 : 49] You're going to be restored as God's people. You're going to be reconciled to God that you have, that the people who have rejected God will be reconciled again to him.

There'll be freedom of captivity from sin and from the brokenness of the world. Provision for the hungry and the thirsty in their souls and in their being.

Guidance as a shepherd, leading us to springs of life. This is what you see in verses 9 through 12. Confident that God, despite the greatest obstacles that we face in life, not even a mountain range will keep us from getting back to this God.

This is a picture of redemption. And this is what God secures in Christ. And it's for all people.

Verse 12. They're going to come from the north. They're going to come from the south. They're going to come from the west. They don't come from the east. They're going to come from all places to return to Jerusalem and to return to God.

[27 : 56] Jerusalem being the metaphorical center of the presence of God in the world. And so John says, But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave them the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Friends, this is the good news of the gospel.

Jesus has come as the servant to secure for us this covenant. We can return to a relationship with God, not because we are ever good enough, not because we will ever be able to keep all of his laws, not because we are ever going to overcome our warped and bent sinful hearts, but because Jesus has come and lived a perfect life on our behalf.

He was the one who came and was the perfectly obedient Israel when Israel had disobeyed. He was the one who came and having lived this perfect life, then willingly laid down his life, saying the wages of sin is death and I will go to death for you so that you might not bear that condemnation, but instead receive from me forgiveness of sin because the sacrifice has been made and the sin has been atoned for.

And he says, And not only will I go to the cross to die for you, but I will be raised on the third day to demonstrate my power over sin and death so that you are no longer slaves to sin.

[29 : 36] You are no longer captives, but you are now able to be free from the power of sin and from the fear of death because you now have an eternal life because by faith, you have joined yourself with me.

And this is what the servant comes to do. This is what he comes to do is to secure us as a people so that we might know him. But as it's already been pointed out, verse 13 is the pinnacle of this passage.

It's not enough that we would simply be God's people. It's that we would be God's people who then worship him because this is why he has created us to reflect.

Remember, we talked about the splendor of God's beauty. You know how you feel when you go to the mountains and you're just, you're filled with overflowing? My kids know because I talk about mountains all the time and they've never been there.

So they're like, Dad, stop. But it's because it's so great that I can't stop talking about it. This is what God has done for us in this servant that he has sent to us in Jesus.

[30 : 42] We have found a savior who is so gracious, so beautiful, so able to help. And he wants us to never stop talking about it.

But instead, as verse 13 says, sing for joy for the God of our salvation. And if you've wondered whether we're just singing about a little tribal God, Isaiah puts a nail in the coffin in verse 13 because he says, it's not just the peoples to the ends of the earth, even the heavens and the earth themselves.

I'm calling to rejoice in this work of redemption. Break forth, oh mountains, into singing for the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.

And friends, I hope you see we didn't have time to do comparative religion and to look at all the other religions in the world and to figure out how these other religions try to solve the problems of sin or the brokenness of the world and where redemption and salvation and hope might come from. But what I want you to see is the Bible says that Jesus alone has done the very thing that we need most so that we might know God again. And you might be here this morning, you're exploring Christianity.

[32 : 00] And what I want to say is keep coming back because we're preaching through the gospel of John and it's this picture of Jesus. Come to figure out what are you going to do with this Jesus?

Maybe you're here and you've been coming to Shoreline for a while. Maybe you grew up in the church, but you've asked these questions. Is God really the God of all people? Or is he just this little tribal God?

If that's true, I'm going to say the same thing. Keep coming back. Jesus doesn't let us sit there in that like, well, I believe in Jesus, but he's just one of the options. If we really see Jesus clearly, he doesn't let us do that.

He says, I am either greater than that or I am nothing. Maybe you've been coming here to Shoreline for a long time and you're rejoicing at this truth this morning and you're confident in it.

Be encouraged. You are a part of what God is doing throughout the world. Raising up this, the good news about this servant so that this one, this Jesus, so that the whole world would know and so that God would call to himself a people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

[33 : 11] Because we know where the end is, don't we? We know that when we look ahead in the book of Revelation, there's a picture of the throne room of God in eternity. And the gospel, and the apostle John writes this, And this is the song that we will sing through eternity with people from all over the world because it was too small for God to raise up a small G tribal God.

Instead, he raised up a servant who would be a redeemer of the whole world. Let's pray together. Jesus, thank you for this word. Thank you for the encouragement that it is.

Thank you for the way that you have reminded us this morning about what a great redeemer we have in Jesus. Lord, I pray for my friends here, Lord, that today you would, by your spirit, apply this to our hearts so that we might be encouraged, so that we might be strengthened.

Lord, we pray for those who are seeking this morning that they might become convinced of what a great God you are. Lord, and know the joy of taking Christ on as their Savior.

Lord, we thank you for this day. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.