

The Glory of the Servant

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Date: 17 July 2022

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's great to see your faces here this morning. I want to welcome you again. And just note, it's a little warm in here. If you need a moment of refreshment, please don't feel like you're going to offend me. If you get up and walk over here, get a drink of water and stand in the air conditioning for a few minutes and come back, we want you to be comfortable and get through the sermons in good measure and good health. So, as you feel the need, please take care of yourself this morning in the heat. It is a sociological reality that the percentage of America who claim to be Christians is decreasing. This is not a news. This is not a surprising thing.

And though some of us may see the loss of Christian America as a call to a culture war, we would want to hear carefully the recognition that this is a reality that our society is shifting.

And we want to ask the question, how do we navigate this? We also need to recognize, if we do some good history, that though it is true that there are new ways in which this is expressing itself, this is not new. When I was a student at Princeton, I was studying the history of American Christianity and noticed that in the 1780s and 90s or in the 1820s and 30s, there was much lamenting, similar to today, about the shift and the change and the distance that our culture is moving from Christian values and principles. So, we need to be aware and not be simplistic as we think about this.

But the reality of the shift in our culture today does make us interact on a daily, weekly, monthly basis with more neighbors, more co-workers, more people in our world who have very different beliefs and very different worldviews than the Christian one. They may practice other religions, they may practice no religion. And when we're faced with a pluralism like this, when we're faced with this reality, a question, I think, can often be raised in our minds. When my neighbor is a good person, they mow their lawn, they put their garbage out, they take care of, you know, we have great neighbors who take care of our house when we're away on vacation. But when they believe something profoundly different than me, what does that mean for my understanding of Christianity? Is my belief in the Christian God, in the God of the Bible, just one belief among many that are all equally valid and equally attractive and really the distinction about them is not significant? Another way to say this is, is Christianity just the God of people who've been raised in Christendom or have been raised in

Christian families? Or is it actually for the whole world? I believe that this is the kind of question that the nation of Israel would have been asking themselves in the 6th century BC as well. We are in a series in the book of Isaiah. If you want to turn there, we'll be in Isaiah 49, page 570 in your pew Bible.

[3 : 45] And as we've talked about this, they lived in a world of other gods, particularly in this section in Isaiah because God is speaking through the prophet Isaiah to the nation of Israel looking ahead to a time when they will be in exile, when they were physically uprooted and many Jewish people were removed from the land of Israel, of Palestine, into Babylon. And they were literally living in exile. They were literally living among other, other people, Babylonians who worshiped the gods of Babylon. They were outside of the promised land and, and they lived in a culture too, which is probably less true today. They lived in a culture where if you had the best God, you won the wars. So if you were in power, if you were in control, there was a cultural understanding, oh, well, that's the God that I should be following because he wins. He's the winner God and I don't want to be a loser God. And so the question of how do I, as a Jewish person, live in Babylon, how do I understand who my God is when it seems like my God's a loser? Is my God really just a small g God, just like all these other ones? Or is he a big God? How do we understand that? I think this is what our passage is going to speak to this morning in Isaiah 49, 1 through 13. And just to remind you a little bit, I know some of you have been coming every week. I'm hoping this is getting into your

brain so that it's going to stick beyond just the one sermon. We're looking at Isaiah 40 through 55, and Isaiah 40 through 48 is significantly about

God's redemption politically of Israel from Babylon through raising up Cyrus and the Persian nations to free the Jewish people to return to Israel, to return to Palestine and restore Jerusalem. So it's primarily political, but there are these little hints, like in verse, in chapter 42, the first couple of verses, there's little hints that God is up to more than that in this season because he's not only raising up Cyrus to be a political redeemer, but he's raising up another one. Another one who's going to be a servant of God who will redeem people not from political oppression and exile, but from sin and from the exile from God that comes from the sin that separates us from him. And this is what Isaiah 49 through 55 is really going to focus in on. So if you're going to be here for the rest of summer, as you get to pick it up on our website afterwards, this is where we're going. We're going to look at the servant, the servant that God is going to raise up, one who is not the nation of Israel, but one who will come to do what Israel could not and come to redeem God's people. So that's where we're at as we come to Isaiah 49 verses 1 through 13. So let's read this, and then we'll dive in and explore it today together. Isaiah 49 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. He made me 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 and vanity. Yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense is 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 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, 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.

[8 : 15] 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. Thus says the Lord, in a time of favor, I have answered you. 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, and all 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. Behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Saini. 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 together. Lord, we thank you for this word.

Lord, we pray that you help us this morning. Lord, to have clarity and understanding, and Lord, to have, Lord, not just understanding in our head, but Lord, that we might receive this in our hearts, that we might see the glory of your servant, and Lord, be moved in faith and in worship to respond to you today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. What 49, 1 through 13 is about is a servant. God is raising up a servant for his people. And who is this servant? There are three movements in this section that tell us a little bit about it. Verses 1 through 4 tells us that this servant is a redeemer who displays the beautiful glory of God. Verses 5 through 7 will tell us that the servant redeemer is exalted to be a light for the whole world.

And verses 8 through 13 will tell us that the servant redeemer secures his people for his praise. So that's my outline. I'll repeat those as we go along if you miss them along the way. The first thing it says, verses 1 through 4, the servant redeemer displays the beautiful glory of God. Now, as we're looking at this, one of the challenges of this passage is that you're trying to figure out who's speaking. There's lots of first-person pronouns, I and you, and this is a dialogue, clearly. And some of the questions are, is it God speaking to Israel? Or is it God speaking to Isaiah?

[11 : 28] And though there may be times when there's a sense where he might be speaking both to Isaiah and to the servant, I think the easiest way to actually make sense of all of what this passage says is to see it as a dialogue between the God of Israel and the servant that he is raising

up, okay? So, and what he says in verses 1 through 4, and centrally he says in verse 3, God says, you are my servant Israel. You are my servant Israel in whom I will be glorified.

And it's striking, we haven't really talked about this as we've talked about this image of a servant. But have you thought about the contrast? In verses, or in chapters 40 through 48, who is God raising up to be its savior? Cyrus, the king of Persia. He's got an army on his back, at his back, and he has great power and prestige in the world. And yet when God says, I'm going to raise up a redeemer for you from your sin, it is not as a king, it is not as a conquering hero, it is not as a general, but it is as a servant. And you saw the little hints through this, a servant who will be despised and rejected, a servant who will face difficulty and rejection from the very people he's coming to redeem.

But in this central section, what God is saying is, this kind of servant, I'm going to raise up to display my glory or my beauty. Another translation might be my splendor, right? What is the splendor of something? A splendor is the qualities of something that's on display so that others can see it and appreciate and respond to it by treating it as something worthy, as something valuable, as something attractive, as something beautiful. I love going to the Rocky Mountains because when you drive up into the town of Estes Park, and you drive up over the first rise, and there's this lake in front of you, and then the mountains, the snow-capped peaks rising up, towering above these gentle slopes.

And it's such a beautiful place. And the splendor of this place moves my heart every time I'm there. This is glory in creation. And what God is saying is, this servant who I am raising up, in him I will display my glory, right? Now, verses 1 talks about how this servant is going to call the whole world, the nations and coastlands are an image that's kind of like shorthand for everybody from everywhere. Come and listen, come and see what God is saying about me, right? And then verse 2 says, and this servant who's being raised up, he's going to have these, it's, God uses military images here, a sword in his mouth and a polished arrow, but his purpose is not military but spiritual. The sword in his mouth in the Bible is always an image of the Word. That this one, Cyrus will come and he will conquer with an army, but this servant will come and he will conquer with his Word. [14 : 51] He will come and he will proclaim truth, and the truth that he will speak will be the thing that will set people free from their bondage. This is how he's going to redeem people.

And the polished arrow is one that simply is so well honed that it will hit its target. And it says that God will succeed in what this servant is being called to do as he is being lifted up.

All right? And so this is what God is doing in this servant. And in verse 4 it says, and this servant won't be received by everybody, but the last two couplet, the last couplet, the servant is expressing confidence that though the people may reject him, God will in the end vindicate him. God will justify him before the people so that he will be seen to be the one that God has raised up to do this work. This is the glory of the servant. This is the God displaying himself through one who will come and be the Word from God that will bring our redemption. This is why, friends, we read from John 1, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Because we see that the ultimate fulfillment of this, and we're going to see this over and over again, is that this is pointing us ahead to Jesus. God is going to raise up this servant, and he is the Word of God, the one in whom the Word that in verse 14 of that part, the Word that becomes flesh and dwells among us, and we have what? Beheld his glory. The glory is of the only one begotten of God, the special, the unique one who will come and who, by his Word, will bring salvation to the world. Now, you may wonder, if you're here today and you're exploring about Christianity, you may wonder, well, how do we know what God is really like? And how do we know that the God of the Bible is something different than other religions? And the Bible has answers to this. We're not going to spend a ton of time on this, but we want to recognize that the impulse to understand the transcendent is a human impulse. It has happened in all cultures, in all times, at all religions. There's some way of trying to figure out how do we explain the unexplainable?

How do we understand this broader thing, experience of spirituality or religion? And the Bible says, well, this makes a ton of sense because God created humanity to know him, to be spiritual people living in spiritual relationship with their creator. And so, this is a created impulse, according to the Bible, that gives great explanation for why we would do this. And yet, the Bible also says that because of humanity's rejection of the God of the Bible, recounted in Genesis 3 and then lived out through the rest of human history up to this point, our desire for that will be misguided and misaimed and misappropriated. And we won't know where to go to find the true God of the Bible.

And the amazing thing about the story of the Scriptures is that God doesn't say, I hope you can figure out who I am.

I hope you're smart enough, clever enough, or imaginative enough to figure out who I am. The God of the Bible comes to us in an incarnate person, the person of Jesus Christ, and says, do you want to know what I look like? This is it. He is the exact image of God. And this is the good news. And Jesus comes to the world and says, behold, this is what God looks like. Look upon me. And if you're here and you're exploring this, or if you're wondering whether these things are true, I encourage you, go back to Jesus. Look at him. Look at the way that he displays the beautiful glory of God. And receive him as God here in Isaiah promises that he will come to be the beautiful Redeemer, the servant who will display the glory of God.

[19:22] Isaiah continues recounting the words of the Redeemer, or the servant in verses 5 through 7. Not only is he the one who comes to display the beautiful glory of God, but he also is the one who is exalted to be the light for the whole world. The core verse in this section of verse 6, the translation here is, let me make sure I'm in the right, here we go. It is too light of a thing that you should be my servant. Some translations, it is too small of a thing. It is too small of a thing for you to be a light just for the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham. And in this, God is challenging the self-orientation because one of the issues that happened in the Jewish nation was their pride became so great that they thought, we are God's people, and we are therefore inherently special, and it's about us. And God says, it is too small for my redemption to be just for a little group of people. You will be a light to these people, and you will redeem them and restore them.

But that is too small for the God of the Bible. Instead, this servant is going to be raised up and exalted. And you see that in verse 5. He's saying, this is how much God has loved me and set His purpose on me and has promised to lift me up, not just for Israel, but for the whole world, right? And it says, I'll make you as a light for the nations. Some translations have Gentiles. Often in the Old Testament, Gentiles is simply shorthand for anyone outside of the nation of Israel. It's not a pejorative term.

It becomes pejorative in the New Testament, but it's not per se a pejorative term. It's just a descriptive term of people who don't know the God of the Bible, right? And it says, the scope and the reach of this servant's redemption will be as light into the darkness of the whole world.

From the north to the south, from the east to the west, throughout all of human history, God's plan has always been to redeem people from every tribe and tongue and nation by sending this servant as a light into the darkness. Now, this light assumes that we actually live in darkness.

And it's not that hard for us to recognize that, is it? We live in spiritual darkness. We don't know God as we ought to. We don't live as if we know God, even when we do know Him the way we ought to.

[22:17] We do not always live out or live in the light that God has given us, and we recognize how much more there is that we don't know. Light here is an image both of moral failure, but also of ignorance.

And ignorance in the, simply, we do not know and we do not understand. And Isaiah says, the servant will come and he will be a light, bringing clarity that illuminates what we only understand dimly. Bringing life, the warmth and the life of light to a world that lives in death and darkness, bringing hope into the darkness of despair in our world.

And to reinforce what he says in verse 6, verse 7 reminds us, you servant, though you are one deeply, though you will not be rejected, at the end of the day, kings and princes, the powers of this world will come and they will prostrate themselves before you. Why? Because God has been a compassionate God who has raised up a Redeemer for you.

And so John tells us about Jesus. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world, He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to become the children of God. This is the great purpose and the great hope of the servant that Isaiah is talking about here, is that one will come and say to all peoples, from the greatest to the least, from the most highly respected to the most rejected, from those who are the most insider, 1% powerful people, to those who are the most excluded, all from every tribe, every tongue, every race, every nation, every gender, no matter where you come from, this servant has come and invited you to know the God of the world, to know Him all. And this has always been, friends, the plan of God. If you go to Genesis and you look at the

promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, it says, I am going to bless you, and I'm going to make you a blessing to the nations of the world. Right? And this thread goes through Isaiah and Psalm 67 that we read earlier. And it goes through this passage in John, that the light came not just for the Jewish people, but for everyone. And it finds its culmination and its crescendo in Revelation, where Jesus the servant sits on the throne, proving to be the one who is worthy as the Redeemer and as the ruler of all people. And around His throne are gathered people from every tongue and tribe and nation. And they bow down before Him, and they say, worthy are you, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and praise. This is what the Bible has said from the very beginning. Don't believe the lie that some people will say that the Bible is just for the Western nations, or just for Jewish people, or just for whatever the small group is that you may think somehow wants to exalt ourselves and be special by saying we're God's special people. God's plan has always been for all people. The invitation is to all to gather a church from every tongue and tribe and nation. God will not be made small. He will not allow Himself to be seen as simply one God among many in the smorgasbord or the cafeteria buffet of religious options for you to choose. The God of the Bible says, I will not receive that. You must take me on my terms, and I am either the God of all or I am not God at all. And that is what the Bible says.

[26 : 53] And so this servant comes and he says, and God says to him, I will make you a light to the nation so that the ends of the earth may see my salvation.

Then verses 8 through 13, the servant redeemer who has displayed God's glory, who's exalted to be a light for all people. Now Isaiah says, the servant redeemer will secure his people for his praise. This is what this last section pictures. A global salvation secured by this servant for all people. We see in verse 8 a key thing. I have heard your cry. I have heard your need. Today I am responding with the provision of salvation through a covenant that I will make. But if you notice carefully, the language here is not, I'm going to make a covenant like the covenant I made with Abraham. I'm going to make a covenant with my people at Sinai where I'm going to say, this is how you must live, and you need to receive that and respond to me. And this is a conditional covenant. But here what we see is God is actually making a covenant by saying, you, my servant, are my covenant. The covenant that he's referring to is actually between God and his servant, where the servant is saying, I am the down payment. I am the security deposit for the salvation of people, not because they will earn it or deserve it or gain it, but because I will do all that is necessary for the achievement of their salvation. And then he pictures, he goes on and he describes in the rest of this section, he pictures this salvation as like a new exodus. God is restoring people from exile and from oppression into the promised land. He is reconciling a people who have rejected God and bringing them back in to be God's people. He is proclaiming their freedom from captivity to sin and to a broken world. He is saying, I will provide for you. Even as you walk through the desert of life in this world, I will provide for you along the way all that you need so that you may receive from me life that will satisfy living water, bread from heaven. There are so many images in the New Testament about Jesus and who he is as he comes to be the provider and satisfier of our souls. He is a guide. He promises to be the shepherd who will lead us through the trials of the desert and the difficulties of life in a fallen world to lead to oases where water can be drunk, to where rest can be found and had. And ultimately confident hope that the God who is bringing this salvation, the servant who is going, who is the guarantee of this, he will look even at the mountains and say, the mountains are nothing. They'll be like a road.

The greatest obstacle that you can imagine in your journey and your pilgrimage to God, the servant will make it like a highway. He will make the way through so that we can know God.

[30 : 19] And in the end, when he says that these will come from afar, from the north, the west, and from Syene, which is the Bible scholars have lots of fun with that one, they have really no idea what it really means. I wonder if it means kind of like what we, when I was growing up, my mom would say, well, you know, maybe you want to go to Timbuktu, right? Now, Timbuktu is actually a place.

And so it should not be disparaged as the farthest ends of the region. But when I was a kid, it was just a symbol of it's so far away, you can't imagine how far it is. And I think that's what verse 12 is saying, even from those who are so far away, they can't imagine ever coming back. God is going to bring them back.

So John says of Jesus, to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave 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 the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Friends, this is why we gather every Sunday, to lift up this servant, Jesus, who has come and fulfilled all that Isaiah said would come from this one. He is the one who displays the glory of God. He is the one who is a light to the nations. He is the one who has, by his life, and death, and resurrection, secured a salvation for us that requires only our reception of it.

[32 : 06] We don't earn it. We can't achieve it. We can't be good enough. There is no privilege or no standing in society that can get us entry into this salvation. But when he calls us in humility and brokenness to recognize we are lost apart from you, but you have given us this Savior. And Jesus says, I have done everything that is required for you. I am the way and the truth and the life. By me, you may come to the Father. And only by me, you may come to the Father. This is the good news of the gospel. This is the heart of the Christian message. And this is what Isaiah is lifting up this morning. And he lifts us up. What is the ultimate purpose of God in this redemption? What is the ultimate purpose of Jesus' mission? It's that we may be a part of a people that God gathers to worship Him forever. And this is what verse 13 is about. This is why it's the end of this passage. Because after he talks about this servant and all that he will do, he then calls us to respond. Sing for joy, O heavens and exalt, O earth. Break forth, O mountains, into singing, for the Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted.

Friends, this is what we gather to do, is to respond in worship, to recognize the value, the glory, the beauty of all that He has done in our salvation. And for that to take a place in our hearts and in our lives greater than all of the idols of our world, all of the achievements, all of the things that we so easily set our hearts on, to set our worship rather on this servant who's lifted up in our midst and the greatness of what He has done for us. And when we see Him like this, then we respond rightly. We see His glory and we humble ourselves. We see His beauty and we sing out of its praise. Just like Julie Andrews in the mountains, singing the glory of the beauty that we see as we behold this servant, Redeemer Jesus. So let's pray together. Lord, thank You for this word, for this reminder. Lord, that many, many years before the time of Jesus, You predicted that You would raise up a servant who would come and be our Savior and our Redeemer, that You would raise one up to display Your glory and be a light to us and secure our salvation. And Lord, we see how You fulfilled that in Jesus. And now how You are working this out in the world, taking this good news to the ends of the earth that all the world might see the God that You are, and that they might turn and find salvation salvation in Jesus. Lord, I pray that as we meditate on these truths, that we would respond in worship and sing Your praises. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.