



Sunday, December 18, 2022

Sunday Sermon: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Isaiah 49

Sermon: An Invitation to Harmonious Healing

Isaiah 49

1 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name. **2** He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. **3** He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."

4 But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God." **5** 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, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength—

6 he says: "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." **7** This is what the Lord says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Restoration of Israel

8 This is what the Lord says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, **9** to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.

10 They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. **11** I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. **12** See, they will come from afar—some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan."

13 Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. **14** But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me."

15 “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! **16** See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. **17** Your children hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you. **18** Lift up your eyes and look around; all your children gather and come to you. As surely as I live,” declares the Lord, “you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride.

19 “Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. **20** The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, ‘This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.’ **21** Then you will say in your heart, ‘Who bore me these? I was bereaved and barren; I was exiled and rejected. Who brought these up? I was left all alone, but these—where have they come from?’”

22 This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “See, I will beckon to the nations, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their hips. **23** Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”

24 Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives be rescued from the fierce? **25** But this is what the Lord says: “Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save. **26** I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Good morning, everyone. It is good to be here even though it's via technology. I am grateful for this. Unfortunately, I couldn't be with you today and I was so looking forward to seeing the children's production and glad that I can watch it online. Today, I joined our online community as together we worship the Lord and see what God has in store for us in **Isaiah 49**.

We're going to take a few moments to look at **Isaiah 49** to see how God's love expands beyond the people of Israel to include all nations and how we too are included in that place of being involved in God's Holy family. We won't go through all of them but there are some key verses to help us show Christ's perspective on us and also to help us understand God's love for us, His compassion for us, and how He cares for us in so many ways.

So we begin at **Isaiah 49:1**, in which God says, “Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.” The nations. The distant lands. These are the areas beyond the borders of Israel. These are the areas of the Gentiles. As we see in **Isaiah 49:6**, it actually uses the word “Gentiles.” So we see God going beyond the nations. In fact, if we look at **Genesis 12**, where God calls Abraham, He says to Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

So here we begin to see how God is expanding that blessing to include all people. In fact, you see the word there for nation. That word is the same word which is used in **Isaiah 49:6** for Gentiles. It is the people beyond the people of Israel.

So it also says in **Isaiah 49:2**, "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me..." A sharpened sword comes out of the mouth of the servant of the Lord. We saw that the title of this section is called, "The Servant of the Lord" so we need to assume that we are talking about Jesus here, and how He is the servant of God.

In **John 1:14**, it says that, "Jesus is the Word and the Word was made flesh," which is what we celebrate at Christmas time when Jesus came and was in the manger. But it also says in **Hebrews 4:12**, that, "God's Word is sharper than a double-edged sword... that it cuts through bone and marrow and it pierces the heart." As we see just beyond that, there is, "He made me a polished arrow," in **Isaiah 49:2**, where we see that God says, "My Word will pierce your heart, and it will cut through to be where you know me in a new way."

Then it also says, "In the shadow of his hand, he hid me." In the shadow of his hand. We see that word used a few other times within the New Testament. Oftentimes within the Psalms, where we see David write that He, "Hides me in the shadow of his wings," it is an aspect of protection. It is an aspect in which God says, "I will cover you and I will protect you."

Then at the end of the verse where it says "his polished arrow," it says, "He concealed me in his quiver." Concealed. For the Jewish people, Jesus was not known immediately. In fact, throughout the Old Testament, they did not know who Jesus was. Even when Jesus came, there were many who did not understand that He was the Messiah. So we see again how Jesus was concealed. But then He was also made known. So He comes out of the shadow of God's wing and presents Himself to other people.

In **Isaiah 49:3**, he says, "He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor." If we go through the Gospels, there are many times when Jesus says that He lives in order to bring glory to God. When Jesus was baptized, we see the heavens open and the Spirit comes down, and God says, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." So Jesus came to bring glory to God.

But then in **Isaiah 49:4**, we have a bit of an interesting twist where it says, "But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all." When would we ever say that Jesus labored in vain? Do we dare say that? But we can understand how Isaiah would say that in many ways, it seems like Jesus has labored in vain many times. If we look at the Old Testament at the work that God has done through the people of Israel, how often has He not shown them the right way through his prophets and then have the people turn around and go somewhere else, to have the people do other things and not follow God's will?

So we see again how often God has worked within the people and then we have left. And that's not just a concept of the Old Testament. That is a concept which we deal with today as well. Right? How often does God move in our lives and we don't go, "Oh, yes, this is what we need to do." Only to once again fall back into old habits or into doing things which we know we shouldn't. And God says, "Have I labored in vain?" But then He says, "Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God." Jesus understands where we're at. Jesus understands that who we are is people who need to be saved. Jesus understands that in the end, God will be glorified.

In fact, in **Philippians 2:10-11**, we read about how, "... every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We see in there as well how Jesus will again then be glorified to be the God of all things.

Then we get to **Isaiah 49:5**, and it 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, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength—" Here it is. Isaiah prophesying about the birth of Christ. Isaiah prophesies about being born and formed within the womb. Isaiah prophesied about Jesus taking on humanity, so that He may live with us and be with us.

In **Isaiah 49:6**, it goes on to say, "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." As mentioned before, the word for Gentile there is the same word used as nations. We see that God is saying now what He already said to Abraham. "I will bless all the nations through you."

But if we look at **Isaiah 49:7**, it says, "... to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation... " So here we have a case in which Jesus came down to the world, to be the Savior of the world, to be the savior of all nations and yet Jesus has come into a people that abhor him and despise him. As we see in Isaiah, "He was despised and rejected by men." So Jesus, out of his great love, has come to a people who despises Him, and yet He comes and He enters.

It's interesting that as we look at this aspect of Jesus coming, He came to heal the deepest wounds of all the Jews. He came to bring them salvation, He came to be their Messiah. The Jews had this concept of a messiah in which the Messiah would come and overthrow Rome, would set everything right again, and they would then be the nation of God and everything would be great. But as we see in the Old Testament, everything was not always great for the people of God. In fact, just being the nation of God wouldn't be enough. There were much deeper wounds that needed to be healed.

We, as Gentiles, have the same. We can say that Jesus can heal us and make us better, but if we look deep within us, there are some needs that only Jesus can heal. If we look at what our deepest needs are, we have to understand that only the Word of God - that is sharper than a two edged sword - can cut far enough to a place in which we can admit and understand the Word of God. Those healings are those wounds that need to be healed.

Isaiah is talking about the restoration of Israel in the next few verses, and we're going to go through those rather quickly. Rather than talking about the restoration of Israel, I want to take some time to point out a few aspects of God that we can learn in those verses. For example, in **Isaiah 49:9**, He says to the captives, "'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'

He's talking to the Israelites. He is saying this at a time in which they are about to be taken into captivity. He is letting them know that there will be a time in which Jesus will free them. But there is much more to this. Jesus also says to us, "What is holding you captive? Where are your chains of captivity holding you down? What is it that is keeping you in darkness?"

Jesus invites us today to come to the manger and be healed. To be freed of those chains, to be freed, to come out of the darkness and into the light. For some of us, the pain which we experience, we don't want to bring into the light because we figure there will be even more pain by bringing it into the light. Jesus says that in that place, "I will be with you."

We notice in Isaiah **49:10,13&15**, there is a common word. In **Isaiah 49:10**, He says, "He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water." It sounds a little bit like **Psalm 23:2** where He says, "... he leadeth me beside the still waters."

Then in **Isaiah 49:13**, it says, "For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones." And in **Isaiah 49:15**, again it says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?" Compassion. The word actually means "to suffer together." Jesus came to earth to forgive our sins. Yes. To die on the cross for us. Yes. But Jesus also came to suffer with us in our humanity.

Jesus came so that we may know that He understands the aspect of loneliness and he understands the aspect of loneliness in a much deeper way than we ever can when He was on the cross. God turned his face from Him but we know that God will never do that.

In fact, in **Isaiah 49:15**, right after it talks about the mother nursing it says, "Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" We can think that it's almost impossible for a nursing mother to not have compassion on their child. But Isaiah is saying here, "Even if that was possible, we need to remember that God will not forget." God will always have compassion on us.

Psalm 27:10, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me." The word "receive" is the same word as "to gather," "to take on to be his own," that God will always be there. That compassionate Father will be there with us. So as He calls us out of this darkness, as He calls us into this place of healing, He reminds us that we are not going alone. We are going to be with Him and He is there with us.

In fact, in **Isaiah 49:16**, the very first part there says, "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; ..." Engraved. We all know what engraving means. Right? You engrave something in glass or in stone and it's a permanent thing. We have this aspect of engraving. Today, we might say, "He tattooed you on the palm of his hand." He tattooed you not someplace where it's not visible and not someplace that can be covered up easily by a shirt sleeve or anything else. But He puts you in a place which is very open and which is there to be seen.

We see that in Jeremiah. It says, "I formed you in the palm of my hand." But now He has engraved you in the palm of his hand as well. Just like God, as we read a few weeks ago, has engraved His Word on our hearts. And we know who God is. God says, "I know who you are and I will never forget you."

There's a lot more that can be said about this but I want to go down to the very last verse in the very last line. **Isaiah 49:26**: "Then all mankind will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." First of all, "... that I, the Lord." Jesus is Lord. He is Lord over all. You'll notice that it uses all capital letters for Lord. So this is not just Lord as in "master." This is Lord as in Yahweh, as in Adonai, the God of all. Then it says, "I am your Savior..." I am the one who has come to save you, to bring you out of that place that you are now stuck in. I have come to be your Savior."

We all know about Jesus dying on the cross and I don't want to take anything from that. But what if Jesus came today to say, "I have come to save you from your pain. I have come to save you from your shame, or your guilt, or your loneliness, or whatever it is that is the deepest part of your wounds that you are trying to cover up through some other way or to push down so that we don't acknowledge it." Jesus says, "I have come to save you from your biggest fears."

Jesus says, "I am your Redeemer." A Redeemer is one who would pay the price to free a slave. We saw earlier about the captives being freed. Jesus on the cross said, "I have freed you from your sin. I have made you right before God. I have bestowed my righteousness upon you." For that we are very grateful. But Jesus also says, "I've come to redeem you, to buy you, to pay for the pains which you now endure. To pay for ways in which you can be free."

So Jesus says, "What if I invite you to come out of that place of darkness, to be freed from whatever is holding you back, and to be living a life of freedom?" Then He uses the term, "Mighty One of Jacob." The word there, a verb, is only used six times in the Old Testament. Each time it is used it talks about God. It talks about God as the Mighty one and the strong one.

In **Isaiah 1:24**, it combines it with, "... the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel." So we see here this aspect of God fighting for us and being powerful enough to do it. The Mighty God, the God of armies. This is the God who comes today and says, "I invite you to come to me."

The title of today's sermon was an invitation to harmonious healing. We see here in **Isaiah 49**, that God has come not just for the Jew but for the Gentile. That God of compassion, the God who suffers with us, has come to save us not just from our sins, but from our sorrow, from our pain and from our deepest hurts. He invited us today to say, "Come to the manger. Come to the Lord Jesus Christ who was born for you to save you, to heal you, to be the Mighty God that you need to free you from your pain, from your addictions, from your sorrow, from anything else that is in your life."

Jesus says, "I want to come to your places of deepest need. I invite you to bring them to me. I invite you to pray to me for healing beyond just the pain of physical healing." We need to pray for healing. I find it kind of ironic that on a day in which I'm preaching about healing, I'm at home because I'm sick. Yet, maybe God is saying in many ways, "We need to look beyond just the physical healing. We need to look to spiritual healing to see what areas within our lives are keeping us from being free, from being in total communion with God, and from being in a place in which we can fellowship with Him freely."

As you came in today, each of you received a piece of paper. For those of us who are at home today, I invite you to find a piece of paper and something to write with. On the top of the piece of paper it says, "I bring to the manger..." I'm going to invite you to think for a moment.

Think about what it is that you need to bring to the manger this Christmas. What is it that's been holding you captive? What is it that is keeping you from deep devotion with God? Maybe it's fear of something. Maybe it's loneliness. Maybe it's shame or guilt. What is it that you need God to heal this Christmas?

In just a few moments, I'm going to invite you to come and place that (piece of paper) in the basket in front of the manger. While we do that, we're going to sing a song called, "O Come, All You Unfaithful." This past week at Coffee Break, the women heard this song. It is a song about honesty about coming to God in a place that we are open and real. God invites us to that. For those of us at home, I invite you to also write something down. If you have a nativity set at home, maybe symbolically bring it to that manger. To Christ who was born this Christmas.

I want to invite you today to come to Jesus and say, "Jesus, I need healing. I need more than physical healing. I need spiritual healing. I come to you with my deepest fears, my deepest wounds, and I bring them to the manger, to God Emmanuel. God with us, who has come as the God of compassion to suffer with us. He has come as our Savior to save us. He has come as our physician to heal us. So join us as we sing, "O Come, All You Unfaithful."

O come, all you unfaithful
Come, weak and unstable
Come, know you are not alone
O come, barren and waiting ones
Weary of praying, come
See what your God has done
Christ is born, Christ is born
Christ is born for you
O come, bitter and broken
Come with fears unspoken
Come, taste of His perfect love
O come, guilty and hiding ones
There is no need to run
See what your God has done
Christ is born, Christ is born
Christ is born for you
He's the Lamb who was given
Slain for our pardon
His promise is peace
For those who believe
He's the Lamb who was given
Slain for our pardon
His promise is peace
For those who believe
So come, though you have nothing
Come, He is the offering
Come, see what your God has done
Christ is born, Christ is born
Christ is born for you
Christ is born, Christ is born
Christ is born for you.

As you go out this week, may you remember about the manger and about bringing your pains and your sorrows to God. May you continue to seek freedom and healing from the Lord our Savior. I invite you to extend your hands and receive the blessing of God.

May the God of compassion fill you with all comfort. May Jesus the great Physician heal you. May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit remind you that you are never alone. The Triune God Father, Son and Holy Spirit is with you all. From now and forevermore. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*