

## **Thinking Too Small**

### **Isaiah 49:1-7**

We are returning this morning to the prophet Isaiah, who we spent Advent with. We generally think of this time of year, from Epiphany to Easter, as a time when we explore what Scripture says, mostly in the Gospels and mostly chronologically, about the life and ministry of Jesus. The passage we were in last week about the baptism of Jesus is a good example, and we will turn next week to a passage about the calling of the disciples. But there is a particular reason to turn to Isaiah as we ask “Who is Jesus?”, because this passage, from 600 years before the birth of Christ, speaks directly to that question.

I’m going to go ahead and give you the punch line. We are going to read this passage as if it were spoken by Jesus, and we are going to read it with the understanding that every Christian – each one of us – is an inheritor of the mission described there. We are going to focus on the mission described in verse 6.

#### **READ Isaiah 49:1-7**

This passage is the second of what are generally known as the “Servant Songs” in Isaiah. The most common one is probably in Chapter 52:13-53:12, which we would readily recognize as the Suffering Servant. Whatever the original hearers of these messages in Israel thought about the identity of the Servant in any of these four songs, Christians clearly identify the Servant as Jesus.

This servant song is presented in the first person – spoken by the servant himself, and telling his own story. That is different from, for example, the Suffering Servant passage, which is written in the third person. But listen to what this servant says.

Verse 1: Before I was born, the Lord called me. That remind you of anyone else? How about Jeremiah? He recounts this word of the Lord at Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” And how about when Jesus called Nathanael to be a disciple? At John 1 48, Nathanael responds to Jesus’ call by asking “How do you know me?...Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip

called you.” Nathanael knew that it would have been common practice for mothers working - in the fields or vineyards or at home - to leave the small children to play or stay out of trouble under the cool shade of the big leaves of a fig tree while they worked. Jesus knew Nathanael from long before Nathanael had a clue.

God knew the plan for Jesus long before He was born. How long? How about from before the creation of the world? **1 Peter 1:20**: “He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”

Before Christ was born, He was part of God’s plan. Before you were born, you were part of that same plan. This is not complicated.

Verse 2: “... he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.” Why did God chose the particular time and place of the birth of Jesus? I don’t know. But we know that it was in God’s plan, and the quote from 1 Peter reminds us that it was for our sake. I think the terminology is interesting. He could have used any image of something that could be concealed or hidden until it was needed, but he chose the image of a polished arrow. That is going to stand out in the quiver among all the plain ones, and it is going to make a serious impression when it is used. The other archers are going to see the sun glint off this one when it comes out of the quiver, and it will get your attention when it flies.

Like the arrow in the quiver, we are to be ready to be used any time, any place, for any purpose. The arrow does not chose when it is going to be used, or what target it will be directed toward. Neither do we, when we are open and available and responsive to God’s call to us.

And here is the meat of the whole passage for us. Verse 6:

**READ Isaiah 49:6**

Would you not think that it would be mission enough to save Israel? After all, they had proven over the course of their history that saving them was not all that easy. They had resisted being saved by repeatedly rejecting the call of God to them to be His people. They had repeatedly heard the call of God to return and be reconciled. And they had repeatedly done it all over again.

The people of Israel had generally thought that being the chosen people of God meant that they were exclusively the chosen people of God – that God had no purpose, no meaning for other people. That was never true. Go all the way back to Genesis, when God called Abraham, when he was still called Abram in his home country.

**READ Genesis 12:1-3**

These people, these wandering, exasperating, flawed people, descended from that promise, were to be a blessing to all nations. We, descended from and inheritors of that same promise, are to be a blessing to all nations. To restore Israel, to be a light to the Gentiles. That doesn't leave anybody out does it? The text in verse 6 sort of implies that the servant was initially thinking too small, focusing only on the people of Israel. If the people of Israel who heard this message from Isaiah saw themselves as the servant, they were definitely thinking too small. They were thinking only about themselves. But God never thinks too small. God's plan is for the universe.

But let's not get lost in that point. Let's not think that because God's plan is for the universe that little ole me can't possibly make a difference. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

The Psalmist looked up at a clear night sky and saw all those stars, and suddenly felt very small. "What is man that you are mindful of him?" [Psalm 8:4] But then he slowed down and thought about it and listened to the voice of God in creation and recognized the unique place that God had made for man in that great universe, and praised God: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

Have you ever heard the expression "Think globally, act locally"? That has perfect application here. We need to understand that what we do and who we are in the service of the Lord is part of a grand plan, but that our part in it starts with one person at a time. We are part of "thinking globally" to bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth, but we do it by "acting locally" in every aspect of our lives right here at New Harmony.

We begin to make a difference to one person when we understand that God makes a difference to one person. God has made a difference to you. He called you by name from before you were born to be part of His plan to save the world. God empowers you

to make a difference to someone else by making a difference to you – right where you are.

When you tell the story of God's movement in your life, even if you just tell it to yourself, you may not think of that story as the story of God bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. But your story is the story of God making a difference to you, and that matters – and it matters because it matters to God.

No how big or small your concept of your own experience of God might be, you should not to think too small and exclude that possibility that it contains the seeds of not just your personal salvation, but something else as well. There are plenty of examples from Scripture and Christian history of one person experiencing God in very powerful ways, with meaning to themselves and meaning much larger than themselves. But even those people that changed the world started from God making a difference to them – and it was in their telling and acting out their story that God made a difference to somebody else through them. It is in us realizing how God makes a difference to us that we begin to make a difference in the world.

Making a difference to one person is not too small for God and it is not too small for us. God is not thinking too small when He is making a difference in one person at a time – God is thinking of the salvation of the world, one person at a time. God is not thinking too small when He is making a difference in you – God is thinking of the salvation of the world, starting with you.

[Prayer – for open hearts, open spirits to allow God to act big in us and save us]