

The Light for the Nations - Isaiah 49

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)*

Warm-Up

1. Are you a "Christmassy" person, or not? What do you love (or not love) about this time of year?

Read Isaiah 49:1–4

2. Who is speaking in verse 1, and who is he speaking to? Why is it significant that this message goes out to "the coastlands" and "peoples from afar"?
3. The servant is called from the womb, made like a sharp sword and a polished arrow, and hidden in the shadow of God's hand. What do these pictures tell us about who the servant is and what he has been prepared for?
4. In verse 3 God calls the servant "Israel". Read Isaiah 48:1–4. Why can't this servant simply be the nation of Israel?
5. Israel was meant to live in relationship with God so that the nations would see his blessing and come to worship him. How did they fall short of that calling?
6. Read Matthew 4:1–11. How does Jesus' time in the wilderness show him to be the new and better Israel?
7. In verse 4 the servant says, "I have labored in vain", yet he trusts that his cause is with the LORD. Where do we see this in Jesus' life? What can we learn from him when our own work for God feels fruitless?
8. Jesus is set apart and unique: there is no other servant, prophet or "fresh word from God" to come. Why does that matter, and where are we tempted to look for something more?

Read Isaiah 49:5–7

9. According to verse 5, what is the servant's first mission? Read verse 15. What does this tell us about God's faithfulness to his people, even after all their rebellion?
10. Why is it "too light a thing" for the servant only to restore Israel (v6)? What does it mean for him to be "a light for the nations", and what does that mean for us here in Australia?
11. Verse 7 describes the servant as "deeply despised, abhorred by the nation". How was this true of Jesus, and how did his rejection and death bring salvation to the world?
12. Read Luke 2:25–32. What did Simeon see when he held the baby Jesus? How does Isaiah 49 help us understand his song?
13. Isaiah's message is for the end of the earth. Who in your life (neighbours, family, friends, workmates) needs to hear about this light? How could inviting them to Carols be an easy first step?
14. As we head towards Christmas, what would it look like for you to "behold Jesus" this season, whether you love Christmas or not? What is one step you could take this week?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your servant Jesus, the light for the nations, so that your salvation might reach to the end of the earth. Thank you that you have not forgotten your people, but have engraved us on the palms of your hands. Help us to behold Jesus this Christmas, and give us courage to share his light with our neighbours, family and friends. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

TITLE: Isaiah - The Light for the Nations
PASSAGE: Isaiah 49
LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM
BI: The servant of the Lord is the new Israel who will bring salvation to the whole world
STRUCTURE:

- 1-4 - Called by God
- 5-7 - To bring Salvation to the World

- If you've known me for any amount of time, you've probably realised that I am not a Christmassy type of guy.
- The whole decorating stuff, putting up a tree, putting up Christmas lights, and just the business of the time of year just doesn't really appeal to me!
- However, almost 5 years ago, everything changed when I married Rach.
- So much so that yesterday, we did this as a family…
- We went to a Colin Concert dressed in matching Christmas shirts!
- Michael Calder six years ago would have been horrified!
- But whether you're a bit of a grinch like me, or you're a die hard get-dressed-up put-out-lights type of person - there is something extremely significant about this time of year.
- What we celebrate and mark on Christmas day is absolutely revolutionary for the whole world.
- It's great news for the whole entire world.
- It's world CHANGING - so significant is this time in history, that our entire calendar is separated by this event…
- Because on that very first Christmas, God sent his servant, his son, into this world! God became flesh!
- And that's why we're looking at the book of Isaiah in the lead up to Christmas, and particularly these 'Servant Songs'.

- The book of Isaiah is often separated into two parts.
- Chapters 1-40 could be called the book of the king - as there is a great focus on the coming king in the line of David and the judgement that he will bring
- 41 to the end could be called the book of the servant - as there is a great focus on God redeeming his people through his servant!
- In these chapters are 4 'Servant Songs' which describe this servant of the Lord
- Last week we looked at the first song in 42 where we saw that the servant is gentle and lowly…
- This week we'll look at the second song in 49
- Next week Chp 50
- The following week - 53 in the song of the suffering servant.
- But as we've already seen - these songs give us a grand picture of Jesus who is the servant of the Lord
- And we need to remember that Jesus didn't come in a vacuum…and he didn't come as a plan B because God's plan A of Israel didn't work
- But he came as the pinnacle of a nation's history and the world's history - to real people, in a real time, in a real context - in order to redeem God's people and reveal the beauty and grace of God in his life, death, and resurrection
- So let's get stuck into this second song.

- **1-4 - Called by God**
- Isaiah here in chapter 49 is prophesying and writing for a people who are in exile…in Babylon…
- But here it's the servant himself who is speaking.
- And firstly, he calls out to all people to listen up!
- The servant speaks to all nations! Coastlands, people from all areas of the world, not just Israel, but the whole world.
- It's actually quite rare in the bible for a prophet to announce something to the whole world…
- So this worldwide proclamation ought to urge us to listen up!
- Because in some sense, the servant is addressing **us** on the other side of the world, some 2700 years later…

- V1 “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.”
- Listen up!
- YHW has set this servant apart from the womb! From the very beginning of his earthly life, there was something different about this servant!
- What’s more, is that this servant is going to have the role of a prophet!
    - A prophet was someone who spoke God’s words to the people - often these words weren’t always easy to hear or read,
- Same here with the servant - he’s going to speak sharp and piercing words…
- And what’s more, is that he is set apart for a special job.
- He describes himself as a polished arrow…
    - Not just any old arrow - but one with the shaft extra clean, the feathers put just so - so that the arrow flies straight and true…
- He describes the Lord having his hand just hovering over the servant, waiting to let him fly…waiting for the right timing…the right moment…because he isn’t just any ordinary prophet or person…this is God’s servant set apart from the Womb.
    - *In some households, you might have fine plates and china and special silver cutlery, hidden in a secret cupboard or linen press?*
    - *But it’s only brought out at significant occasions like maybe the Christmas lunch or parties..*
    - *They are set apart for a specific purpose…not everyday stuff that you chuck through the dishwasher…*
- Well, that’s the image that we are given about the servant.
- He has a particular calling…a special role as God’s prophet

- Who is this prophetic special significant servant?
- V3 “And he [YHW] said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”
- The servant is Israel…but not the nation of Israel…
- Because we saw last week in Chapter 42 that the nation Israel was called Gods servant, but they didn’t live up to the task!
- 48:1 says that they have taken the name Israel, their lips say that they follow the Lord…but they don’t truly worship him…they didn’t listen to God or obey him
- 48:4 says that the nation of Israel had a stiff neck and thick head!
    - “I know that you are obstinate and your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead brass”
    - Slow to learn and slow to turn to God!
- So this servant in 49 has to be someone different from the nation of Israel…
- Someone worthy of the name God gave to Jacob for his covenant people whom he called to live for him…
- The servant needs to be someone who is actually going to fulfil the role that the Israelites were chosen to fulfill but didn’t!
    - They were supposed to live in relationship with God, obey him, listen to him, IN ORDER that the nations would see them and their blessings from God and then come and worship YHW and glorify him…
    - But instead, they rejected God. They worshipped idols, they forgot about his word and his teachings…and they were punished, and the nations mocked YHW instead of glorifying him.

- BUT NOW in Ch49:3 - God says that he will actually be glorified through this new Israel. People will see God’s beauty in this new Israel.
- So then…who is this especially set apart servant, who will be sent at just the right time, who will cause people to glorify God, who is the new and better Israel?
- It’s Jesus!

- He was kept hidden from humanity before he became human..waiting for the right timing
- He was called and given to his virgin mother, Mary.
- He was circumcised as an Israelite at the temple as he was supposed to be..
- People wondered at his sharp tongue even as a teenager! And as an adult, his words divided people.
- And he was obedient whereas the Israelites weren’t.

- This is so clearly seen in the early history of the Israelites.
- After being rescued from slavery in Egypt and walking to the new promised land through the wilderness - they started to complain about stuff. They complained about the food, they bowed down to a golden calf and began to worship it, they complained about the people God told them to defeat…they were disobedient!
- But when life was tough for Jesus - he drew near to God…
- When he was rejected by the religious leaders, by his own family, denied by one of his closest mates, betrayed with a kiss, deserted in his hour of need, he didn't grumble…but came to God.
- And in fact, this notion of Jesus being the new and better Israel, the servant of the lord, is so clearly seen when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness.

- You might remember, that after Jesus was baptised, he was sent into the desert, the wilderness for 40 days and nights and was tempted by Satan…but then Jesus quoted scripture back to Satan and was obedient…
    - And often this is taught in Sunday School and in sermons as "So then remember your scripture when tempted and quote it back!"
    - And while that's not wrong - it's not the whole picture!
- Because this is Jesus doing what Israel couldn't have done!
- Jesus is the new and better Israel who has come to be obedient to God and bring glory to God - even through trials and temptations…

- V4 "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 with my God."
- This is Jesus!
- Jesus is set apart, he's unique, he's vastly superior, there's no one better to come, no other servant needed, no other prophet to come, no other "Fresh Word from God" - he IS God's chosen prophetic servant!
- And he's sent for a purpose.

- **5-7 - To Bring Salvation to the World**
- *I wonder if you've had the experience of mindlessly walking into a room in your house while thinking about something else, and then wondering what on earth you came into the kitchen or bedroom for?*
- *I have to admit, it happens to me a bit too often!*
- Well, Jesus doesn't have that problem!
- The servant in Ch49 is sent with a specific purpose, to redeem Israel and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.
- V5 "And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him— for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—"
- Jesus came as a Jew - as an Israelite, in order to, firstly, save the Israelites.
- In fact, you could say that God sent Israel, to Israel, in order to redeem Israel!
- He was sent to teach the nation, to call them back to the true worship of God! To bring them truly out of their exile! And to make the final sacrifice for their sin in his death on the cross!
- God hadn't ditched or forgotten his people!
    - Later on in V15 - God says about his people "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;"
- God made a promise to his people, a covenant to his people, and he didn't forget them, and hasn't forgotten them - but sent his servant Jesus to bring them back to God!
- But that's not all!
- V6 "he [the LORD] says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
- It's too small of a thing for the servant to redeem and rescue his faithful people Israel…So - this mission gets expanded - to the ends of the earth.

- Remember that the servant is speaking to the whole world from V1? Here's the good news for the whole world - the salvation from sin and death isn't just for the Isarelites, but it's for the whole world made possible through the servant who saves both the jews and the nations - the gentiles!
- He will be the true light to the nations, he will show off God's grace and goodness to perfection and his salvation will be made available to all nations.
- This salvation from sin and salvation from the rightful anger of God that we deserve because of our disobedience, it was made available to us here today because of this servant - Jesus!

- This is all made possible because although he came to his own people, the nation didn't like him. They didn't receive him. The religious leaders hated him and killed him because they preferred their own way of doing things…
- But through that death of the servant [which we'll examine more closely in a few weeks time] he was taking the anger of God that we deserve, he was taking the darkness on himself, and putting it to death.
- And he was raised three days later! And he will come again! And the whole world will see him for who he is! And he will call his faithful people both Jew and Gentile to the new creation…to eternal life.
- V7 "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."

- And about 700 years later after Isaiah… a baby was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Jesus the chosen servant was born.
- Shepherds came to see him; wise men from the nations came to worship him; and the angels sang Glory to God.
- And still when he was a little bundle…he was brought to the temple and a man was there called Simeon
- He was waiting for the COMFORT of Israel to come…the rescue of Israel to come. In fact, God told him that he wouldn't die until he had seen this servant…
- And so in walk Mary and Joseph with little baby Jesus…maybe still only 4kg…
- And Simeon takes the baby in his arms…this little baby in his big arms and says these words:
    - Luke 2:29-32 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."
- Here is God's servant…Here is the salvation for the world…here is the light for the nations…here is the true Israelite….Jesus.
- There's no one else greater. No one better coming. No other way to salvation. No other source of Hope. It's only in Jesus.
- So if you haven't yet turned to Jesus and asked him for forgiveness for living in ignorance and living against him - now is a great time to do so!!

- Or maybe you have done so…and have been following Jesus for a long time now.
- As we head into this Christmas period…even if you're not christmassy just like me…behold Jesus. Remember just how great he is and how faithful he is to us.
- And share Jesus. His salvation is for the ends of the world - right here today, for our neighbours, family, friends - it's for all nations and generations!
    - If you don't know where to start - Carols is a great and easy invitation!
- Because he is God's chosen servant…sent to bring his salvation to the whole world.