

I'm continuing to preach on Epiphany themes, which means that we are hearing about Jesus being *made manifest* or *revealed* to the world. This is one of the ways that the church calendar helps us tell the gospel: what happens after Christmas? The light of Jesus keeps shining brighter and brighter.

Last week, we looked at Peter's epiphany that the gospel was meant for the whole world, and that the followers of Jesus were the ones called to share it with the world. This week, we get something of an inside look into God's mind as to why He chose to expand His salvation from the Jewish people to all people. Peter is blown away by the *what*; today we're going to look at the *why*.

And to do this, we're going way back into the OT, back into Isaiah's prophecy, where we get to overhear an interaction between the Servant and the Lord God. And we're going to take Simeon's word for it that Jesus is the fulfillment of verse 6 – in Luke 2, Simeon rejoices that the baby Jesus is *a light for the nations*, for the Gentiles. Isaiah's prophecy about the Servant is all about Jesus. Jesus is the Servant.

And so I want to touch on five aspects of this prophecy about the Servant, and then draw five corresponding lessons for us. Here are five things about the servant: First, in v. 1 and then in v. 3, the Servant's *Call*. Second, in v. 2, the Servant's *Mouth*. Third, in v. 4, the Servant's Lament. Fourth, in vv. 5-6, the Servant's Honor. And finally, fifth, in v. 7, the Servant's Glory.

So first, **the Servant's Call**: The Servant begins by speaking to the nations and *commanding* their attention, and He's announcing the source of His authority. Why should the nations listen to Jesus? Because of what He says here: He was called by God from the womb, "named", that is *commissioned*, while still in His mother's body. And you should remember from our Christmas texts that this is exactly what happened: the angel gives Jesus a name that describes His mission: "You shall call his name "Jesus", for he will save his people from their sins."

Now, the angel states what Jesus will do *for us*, while here in verse 3 we hear what Jesus will do *for God*: Jesus is made the Servant *in whom God will be glorified*. His mission is to bring God glory. That mission gets explained a bit more in verse 6: the Servant is called to glorify God *by bringing Israel back to God*. The Servant is sent to save people from their sins, and bring them back to God. That's how He glorifies God. That's what He's called to do.

Point 2, **the Servant's Mouth**. What tool or weapon or instrument does God give the Servant to accomplish this mission? Verse 2 tells us that God makes the Servant's *mouth* like a sharp sword. This immediately makes us think of Heb. 4:12 – the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. Also, Revelation 19 – the Rider on the White Horse, who is name is "the Word of God", from His mouth comes a sharp sword. By the Word of His mouth, Jesus rules the nations. The sword is *two-edged*: for some people, the Word is a Word of life, for others, the Word brings death. The important thing is that the Servant accomplishes His mission with His mouth, through the preaching of the gospel.

Number 3, **the Servant's Lament**: This is the strange and unexpected part. In verse 4, the Servant says that He has *failed*, that He has *labored in vain*. This is where it's hard to see how Jesus could be the Servant, because how could Jesus fail?

But look with me at Matthew 23:37: Jesus says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing." See that? Jesus was sent to gather Israel back to God, but she refused. His labor was in vain. And this will make more sense in a minute, but *right after that lament in Matthew 23*, Jesus prophesies that as a result, Jerusalem will be destroyed, but that "the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations." Watch for that in Isaiah's prophecy here in a moment.

And so it isn't really that the Servant has failed; all the blame is placed on *Jerusalem* for refusing to listen. His labor was in vain, but He was faithful. And so He says in the second half of verse 4: "Yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God." Even though Israel was stubborn and rebellious, doesn't the Servant deserve recognition for His faithful labors? Even before He was born He was given this task, and He faithfully and perfectly carried it out. It's not right for Israel's sin to prevent the Servant from receiving honor.

And so we look to verse 5 to see **the Servant's Honor**: The Lord responds to the one He called and formed from the womb, and He bestows honor and strength on the Servant. The Servant did exactly what He was supposed to do. God recognizes a job well done, and so in verse 6, God rewards the Servant with *more responsibility*, with a *greater scope* to His mission: "it's too little for you just to raise up Jacob and bring back Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

If Jesus were a 60 watt bulb, then lighting up a room would be a good job for Him. But Jesus shines brighter than the sun! If you try to light up a room with the full power of the sun, everyone who went into the room would shield their eyes and say "Turn it off! Turn it off! Too bright!" Which is what Israel did. But if you back up that same sun 93 million miles, that sun is perfect to light up the whole world.

Jesus is too bright to light up Israel. He's too glorious. It's *too small a thing* for Jesus to be the Savior of the tribes of Jacob. The salvation of God is meant to reach to the end of the earth, and *that's* a task worthy of the Servant.

And so in verse 7, we come to **the Servant's glory**. The Lord, the Redeemer, the Holy one of Israel speaks to the *deeply despised* Servant who is *abhorred* by the nation of Israel, and promises that kings shall see and arise, princes will prostrate themselves. "The nation" abhors Him, but "the nations" will come and worship Him. The Servant went first to bring Israel back to God, and they rejected Him, but then God sent Him to bring all the nations of the earth back to God, and all the nations bow before Him. That's how Jesus becomes a light to the nations, and

that's how Jesus the Servant fulfills His calling and glorifies God! And I wish we had time to skip over to Romans 9-11 and see how this is actually part of God's plan to make Israel jealous of the nations so that Israel too will come back and worship at the feet of Jesus. That's another sermon for another day.

But in the time we have left, I want us to draw some lessons from the Servant. What does it mean for us?

The **first** lesson for us comes from the Servant's Call, where we learn that God desires to be glorified in Jesus. That's the highest and greatest purpose that God has in anything He does: from Him and to Him and through Him are all things, to Him be glory forever and ever. Whatever God does, He does for His own glory. And listen to Acts 13:47: Paul says "the Lord commanded *us*, saying: "I have made you a light for the gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." Paul says that Jesus' mission is given to *us*. If you believe in Jesus, then you are in Christ, and since you are in Christ, God says to you: "You are my servant in whom I will be glorified." Make that your identity this week: "Wherever I go, I am here to bring glory to God."

Second, the way God wants us to glorify Him is by bringing people back to God with our mouths. That's what we learn from the Servant's Mouth. The gospel calls people out of sin and back to God. God puts that sharp sword in the Church's hand; He makes you His polished arrows. It is true that you should do everything to the glory of God, but what *especially* brings glory to God is testifying about Jesus in order to bring people to salvation. Out of all the ways you can glorify God, this one is the heart of it all. So ask yourself: "Is my mouth a gospel sword?"

Third, think about this: *short term failure or an apparent lack of success in proclaiming the gospel does not take away Jesus' right to glory*. Just because the mission is *hard*, just because we haven't seen success *yet* doesn't mean that we should give up! This is what we learn from the Servant's lament, and I find this particularly encouraging for us as a church. This is where our congregation is the weakest, this is where we haven't been effective - in calling our neighbors and friends to Jesus. But not only does God not frown at us and get rid of us, He honors us by giving us another day, another chance. Oh, thank God! We still have the opportunity *today* to do what we can to bring glory to Jesus.

And **fourth**, here's more good news: *God honors faithfulness with greater opportunities*. That's what we learn from the Servant's honor. If we are faithful in little ways, God will give us more and more chances to bring glory to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and calling sinners back to God. And so instead of giving up when our mission seems like a failure, God actually calls us think bigger and cast a wider net. Next door neighbors don't want to hear the gospel? Try two doors down. Is Annapolis already full of gospel-preaching churches? Let's help plant a church at the ends of the earth. That's what God did with Jesus: when Israel refused to hear, God made Jesus to be a light to the nations. Don't be discouraged! Think bigger! More glory for Jesus!

Listen! Never settle for just a little bit of glory for Jesus. It is *too small a thing* for Jesus to be the savior of a few people in our church. Jesus deserves the glory of being the savior of Annapolis, of Maryland, of the United States, of the world! The gospel is not just for the Jews, not just for a few, *because Jesus deserves more glory*. Your job is to bring more glory to Jesus, and when you are faithful in small things, God will give you greater opportunities.

Fifth and finally, because the Lord is faithful, kings and nations will bow down to Jesus. God has decided that Jesus has not been given enough glory yet, but God is absolutely determined that Jesus will receive the glory that He is due. Do some despise and abhor Jesus? Doesn't matter. Kings will rise up before Him, princes will bow down to Him.

When we pray for our president and other authorities, it can feel like verse 4, like we're wasting our breath. But we cling to the promise of verse 7 – earthly rulers will bow to Jesus, not just claiming to be Christians, but governing like Christians, submitting to the rule of Jesus. That's what we pray for, because that's what God promises, because that's the glory that Jesus deserves.

One day, every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and this means that the success of God's mission is guaranteed! This is the hope that enables us to spend our strength for nothing, and still not lose heart. This is why even when we aren't seeing immediate success in evangelism, we still press on in confident hope. God is at work in us to bring glory to Jesus, and our mission will succeed not because we are so great at it, but because God is faithful! Jesus is absolutely determined to bring glory to God, and God is absolutely committed to bringing glory to Jesus. May we share that goal and lift up Jesus as a light to the nations.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Let us pray: "Everlasting God, you brought the nations to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. Fill the world with your glory, and show yourself to all the nations, through him who is the true light and the bright morning star, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**"¹

¹ Taken from *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2nd edition, F.1.4.5, pg. 504.