

Seeking Opportunities to Serve

Isaiah 49:1-7 (January 15, 2023)

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¹Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. ²He 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. ³And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." ⁴But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." ⁵And now the Lord says, who formed me in 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 sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength— ⁶he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

⁷Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Historical Context

This passage is the second of the Servant songs in Isaiah. It describes the status and role of the suffering servant of the Lord, the messiah. It falls within what is often called Second (Deutero) Isaiah, chapter 40-55. In this passage, the Lord, through Isaiah, speaks to the church today. We are reminded of our place in God's sight, our task in the world and our share in eternity.

Theme: Seeking Opportunities to Serve

Soren Kierkegaard famously has said: "The door to happiness opens outward."

The Servant of God refers both to a faithful individual who is called to bring about healing and liberation to those in need, as well as to the people of Judah as a fragmented exilic community who is given a newfound goal in life; to look beyond their own self-interest and see their role as being of service to the many foreigners who cross their paths on a daily basis.

This text offers some important perspectives for many individuals and communities experiencing hardship today. It is a powerful perspective to find ways to move past one's own experience of vulnerability and find ways to be a source of comfort and consolation to others who might be in an equally precarious situation. This means truly recognizing others as equals who need care and comfort, standing with those who are hurting, and breaking the chains of those who are imprisoned by those forces and powers that impinge on people's basic human rights.

Thousands of years after the original words of this Servant Song were spoken, God continues to call people to service, called to be leaders in church and society. What a difference would this outward-looking mentality make when everyone, regardless of our own trials and tribulations, seeks opportunities to serve one another, to open up the doors of happiness by taking care of the many others with whom we share the world?