

Called To Be A Servant

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Advent: The Oldest Christmas Songs

Isaiah 49:1-9

Have any of you set as a goal for your life becoming a servant? That what you are targeting for success is servanthood? 21st century America has all but eliminated the concept of servant as a positive thing from contemporary life. Oh, the waiter or waitress at your favorite restaurant is called your “server” and we talk about civil servants and public servants, but mostly that sounds pretty hollow.

What we Americans focus upon in terms of success clearly is power – who has it, who wants it, who controls things. Newspaper articles aren’t written about servants, they are written about who is running for governor in the next campaign – who has the inside track, whose stock is rising, and whose stock is falling. What contemporary Americans are concerned about is power. Who has been forced out of the president’s cabinet? Who still has his ear? Who is in his inner circle?

We Americans care about celebrities. Who is on the A-list for parties at the Academy Awards? Who’s hot; who’s not. We care about wealth. Who is on the Forbes List of 100 Wealthiest Americans? We care about who has the biggest sports contracts.

When we hear a word like “servant” it conjures up images of Kunte Kinte from Roots. Someone who gets mistreated, someone oppressed, someone who is dominated; someone who has their human dignity stripped, someone who is forced into servanthood. The idea that someone would set servanthood as a goal, that servanthood would be voluntary, rather than imposed, is not on our radar screens.

And then we come to the prophet Isaiah and four passages from Isaiah that I titled last week, “The Oldest Christmas Songs.” These are four songs from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, written 700 years before the time of Christ, which prophesy the coming of Christ. The four songs all concern a hugely significant figure who is simply called “the servant of the Lord.”

Servant of the Lord. What a strange way to identify yourself. Few would say that they identify themselves primarily as a servant of the Lord. We have so many different ways of labeling ourselves now. We’re single or married, male or female; parents or not. We label ourselves by our professions – doctor, lawyer, Indian chief, IT guy, bank teller, and cosmetologist. We identify ourselves by our place of birth. You were born in Ohio, West Virginia, New York, or God-forbid, Michigan. We label ourselves by what part of town we live in. Oh, you’re from

Upper Arlington. When did you graduate from high school? Did you know so-and-so? We label ourselves by our religion, our ethnicity, what sports teams we like, what bands we're fans of, what universities we graduated from.

There are so many different ways to label yourself and identify yourself in contrast to the rest of the world. And then we come to this very odd, almost entirely foreign sounding descriptor for the one whose birth we celebrate on Christmas: Servant of the Lord. And do you know that Servant of the Lord was a fundamental way that Jesus Christ saw his task on earth? Mark 10:45,

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Mk 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

I came not to be a celebrity, not to be a powerbroker, not to be in some inner circle that is privy to really key information. I came to serve. And servanthood was a primary way that the apostle Paul, the great missionary and spreader of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, identified himself. Romans 1:1, Phil. 1:1, and 2 Cor. 4:5.

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Ro 1:1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

Phil 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

2Co 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

When we think about success, what it means to be really great, to live a worthwhile life, followers of Jesus are called to servanthood. Matthew 20:25-28,

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Mt 20:25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Mt 20:26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

Mt 20:27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—

Mt 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

I've called today's talk very simply, "Called to be a Servant." Let's pray.

Isaiah 49:1-6

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Isa 49:1 Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the LORD called me;
from my birth he has made mention of my name.
Isa 49:2 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.
Isa 49:3 He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
Isa 49:4 But I said, "I have labored to no purpose;
I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD'S hand,
and my reward is with my God."

Isa 49:5 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—
Isa 49:6 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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

This message about the servant of the Lord is to go to the ends of the earth. The message about the servant of the Lord is not one that is owned by the nation of Israel as if it was their exclusive possession. The message that the servant of the Lord is Jesus is not an American message. It is not a western message, or at worst, some imperialist message imposed upon the worlds. Often, when people in the past talked about Christianizing the world, what they meant was westernizing the world – making the world more European or American. This message about the servant of the Lord doesn't destroy other cultures. Rather, the message of the servant of the Lord has something to say to every culture. To every culture and to every person on the earth, the Servant says: God has an assignment for you. Verses 1-2

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Isa 49:1 Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the LORD called me;
from my birth he has made mention of my name.

From this servant's birth, God determined that the servant would powerfully impact the world through his words. His words would be like a sword, cutting, piercing, dividing people.

Do not misunderstand. When we call Jesus a servant we are not somehow diminishing his authority. The way that Jesus demonstrated his authority was through powerful words. Mt. 7:24-27,

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Mt 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Mt 7:25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

Mt 7:26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

Mt 7:27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Listen, floods come into every life. You may be experiencing a storm, a flood, right now. The storm may be a crisis in your marriage. You may be going through a divorce, or a separation. The storm in your life may be internal. You can't overcome depression, or guilt over something you've done. You don't have the power to break an addictive habit. Or maybe you are facing the storm of cancer or some other disease. You are caught in a storm at work.

Every human being encounters various storms along the way. Jesus tells us how to endure the storm despite building our lives on his word – not just hearing what he says, but actually putting his words into practice. One way to put his words into practice is to recognize that just as God had an assignment for Jesus, God has an assignment for you. Jesus was on assignment from birth to be a servant of the Lord. And we who are attached to him are called to imitate him as servants of the Lord. What was true of Jesus is to be true of us.

The servant of the Lord in Isaiah was chosen for his assignment in verses 5-6 before his birth. Do you know, friend, if you are a Christian, you were chosen before you were born. In fact, you were chosen before the world was created. Ephesians 1:4-5,

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Eph 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Eph 1:5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

God has a purpose for your life. Romans 8:28-29,

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Ro 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Ro 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

The Bible tells us that if you are a servant of the Lord there is a plan, a destiny that God has in mind for you. Life is about discovering God's purpose for you, God's assignment for you in this world. To miss your assignment is to live a wasted life. Life is not about creating your own dreams and going after them. People who live with no sense of God's assignment, God's purpose for them, continually drift from one experience to another. At worst, they move from one buzz to another. Or they may move from one job to another, one ministry to another – always discontent, always searching, always frustrated, never at peace.

As I said to you last week, do you ever allow yourself to imagine that God had a purpose in mind when he formed you in the womb? That God has the reason for your life right now? Do you ever let yourself imagine that God had a unique destiny in mind when he made you and that you are the only person on earth who can fulfill your destiny?

There is a portion of this world, there are situations, there are people, there are decisions that only you can touch in the unique way that God has purposed this world to work. Only you can impact the world the way that God has uniquely assigned you to impact the world. And friend, here is a little secret: Life is all about choosing for or against your assignment from God, your destiny from the Lord. Sometimes the choice is huge. There is an obvious fork in the road and if you take one fork it is going to lead you to a mammoth life change, a radically different trajectory, than if you take the other fork.

That is what happened to me when I felt that the Lord had given me an assignment, a calling, to leave my job where I was very happy teaching law at OSU in the business college. But he had an assignment for me to pastor. Most of the times, the choices are not as monumental. But the servant of the Lord always understands that they are on assignment from God whether the thing is big and obvious, or it is small. If you are the servant of the Lord, then the phone call God wants you to make, the letter you need to write, the relationship you need to reconcile, the person who has been pushed to the margins that you need to reach out toward and pull back in, the prayer you need to pray, the conversation, however hard, you need to have, no one else can complete this assignment other than you.

Friend, do you have a sense of purpose? Do you go to your job saying: I am here as a servant of the Lord? I am not just a servant of my clients, or my boss, or my customers, or my patients. I'm not just a servant of my daytimer, or my desk. I'm on assignment at my job. Do you feel that way? Do you say to yourself: This job may not be my life's dream, this class, this meeting may not be the be-all, end-all of my life. But in Christ, I am called to uniquely impact people in my sphere in a way that no one else can. In Christ, as a servant of the Lord, I am on assignment to make choices and decisions that only I can make.

Friend, you matter. Your choices matter. God has a purpose for you, a destiny for you, an assignment for you. Do you embrace that?

Well, we read in Isaiah 49:3 that the servant was not only given an assignment, but he was also given attractiveness. Isaiah 49:3,

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Isa 49:3 He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.

The nation of Israel was appointed by God to live such an attractive life, a good life, that the nations around Israel would be drawn to God. Is. 2:1-5,

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Isa 2:1 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

Isa 2:2 In the last days

the mountain of the LORD'S temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

Isa 2:3 Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isa 2:4 He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

Isa 2:5 Come, O house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD.

The nations, it says, will make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, being drawn to Israel. It says in Is. 2:2,

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Isa 2:2 In the last days
the mountain of the LORD'S temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

It says that the nations will stream to Israel. The reason the nations will stream to Israel would be to learn about the Lord and to learn about the Lord's ways.

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"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Zechariah prophesied this in Zechariah 8:20-23,

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Zec 8:20 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come,

Zec 8:21 and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going.'

Zec 8:22 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him."

Zec 8:23 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.' "

But these prophecies of the nations streaming into Jerusalem, these predictions of men laying hold of a Jew and saying: "Let us to with you because we have heard that God is with you" would only be fulfilled in the nation of Israel was faithful to its calling. Only if Israel lived in submission to the Lord, as a servant of the Lord, would she be attractive.

The Hebrew Bible tells us that Israel did not live as a servant of the Lord. Israel went ahead and served other gods. Israel took the blessings of God for granted and began to believe that the blessings were theirs by divine right whether they were faithful to God or not. God would still give them these blessings. By refusing to be the servant of the Lord, by deciding to go its own way and carve out its own path in life, Israel lost its attractiveness. Israel was not distinct. Israel assimilated the practices of the nations and made them their own. Israel became a blind and deaf servant. Is. 42:18-25,

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Isa 42:18 "Hear, you deaf;

look, you blind, and see!

Isa 42:19 Who is blind but my servant,
and deaf like the messenger I send?

Who is blind like the one committed to me,
blind like the servant of the LORD?

Isa 42:20 You have seen many things, but have paid no attention;
your ears are open, but you hear nothing."

Isa 42:21 It pleased the LORD
for the sake of his righteousness
to make his law great and glorious.

Isa 42:22 But this is a people plundered and looted,
all of them trapped in pits
or hidden away in prisons.
They have become plunder,
with no one to rescue them;
they have been made loot,
with no one to say, "Send them back."

Isa 42:23 Which of you will listen to this
or pay close attention in time to come?

Isa 42:24 Who handed Jacob over to become loot,
and Israel to the plunderers?

Was it not the LORD,
against whom we have sinned?
For they would not follow his ways;
they did not obey his law.

Isa 42:25 So he poured out on them his burning anger,
the violence of war.
It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand;
it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart.

The Hebrew Bible tells us that Israel became ugly and the nations no longer asked, "What is it that makes you tick? You must have something going on in your life that we want." Rather than stream to Israel to learn about their obvious

superior ways, the nations attacked unfaithful Israel. So what does God do? Does the Lord say: Well, I'm just going to let the world grope in darkness, trying to follow a blind servant?

Does God say: I'm going to leave the world without a light, without a witness? I'll just let men and women die in their sins without hope and peace, without a sense of destiny in their lives, without me?

God is so merciful that he sent another servant to fulfill the calling of national Israel. This second servant, his purpose was to function as Israel was meant to function. This second servant, Messiah Jesus, will be God's ideal Israel. The second servant will do and be all that the nation of Israel was meant to do and be, but never was. Is. 49:3,

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Isa 49:3 He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.

God is speaking to the servant of the Lord saying: You are going to be for me my true Israel. You are going to fulfill Israel's destiny.

How do we know that he is speaking to an individual who he is calling "Israel" and not national Israel? We know because of verse 5,

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Isa 49:5 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—

This servant is going to bring Jacob back to God. He is going to gather Israel to himself. He could not be national Israel, since he is going to gather national Israel to himself. In fact, he is going to fulfill Israel's destiny, his destiny to attract the nations to God. Verse 6,

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Isa 49:6 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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Israel was called to be a light to the Gentiles, to live in such an exemplary way that the nations would stream to Jerusalem. But Israel forgot that it was called to be the servant of the Lord, submitted to God, and so God raised up another servant, who will submit to God the Father. This other servant will fulfill Israel's call to be a light to the ends of the earth.

The New Testament gospels and the book of Matthew in particular sees in Jesus' life the retelling of the story of Israel. Jesus, according to Matthew, goes through all of the various experiences of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, only he is faithful where Israel was unfaithful. Jesus is Israel in person. Sometimes you hear radio preachers say: If you want to find the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, keep your eyes on the Middle East and the nation of Israel. To that statement, I would respond, and the gospel writer Matthew would respond, and Isaiah the prophet would respond: If you want to find the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't fixate on events in the Middle East, or the latest newspaper headlines concerning what is happening in the land of Israel. Open your bible and look for Jesus. Open your eyes and watch for Jesus' activity in the world. Jesus recapitulates in himself the history of Israel.

For example, immediately after his birth, Jesus was sent to Egypt as a refugee, just as in the Old Testament Jacob and his whole family went down to Egypt as refugees. Jesus was called out of Egypt, just like the Israelites were called out in the Exodus. Matthew sees in the life of Jesus the story of Israel told event by event. In Matthew 3 Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River. Just as the nation of Israel went through the water of the Red Sea and was given the law concerning their status as God's sons and daughters, so Jesus goes through the river Jordan and receives God's Spirit confirming him as God's son. Jesus is Israel in person.

In Matthew 4 Jesus goes into the wilderness for 40 days recapitulating the 40 years of Israel in the wilderness. But rather than succumbing to the temptations that Israel succumbed to in the wilderness, Jesus overcomes the devil. He was faithful, where Israel was unfaithful. Most importantly, Jesus fulfills the task that Israel failed at to be a light to the nations as the servant of the Lord. People were drawn to Jesus. It says of this faithful servant in Is. 49:3,

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Isa 49:3 He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."

That's what God did in Jesus. He displayed his splendor. Here is what it says in Hebrews 1:3

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Heb 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Jesus attracted people to God. We read in John 12:32,

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Jn 12:32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

If you are far from God today, look at Jesus. Look at the kind of life he lived. Watch Jesus interact with people – with broken people, people who have sabotaged their lives, with wealthy people who have made a mess of things. If you are far from God, I would encourage you to read the gospels and look at the way Jesus interacted with people – partyers, successful businessmen, wealthy women, prostitutes, the dregs of society and the cream of society. Watch the way Jesus interacts with people and ask yourself: If God is like this person, Jesus, why wouldn't I want a relationship with him?

On a slightly different note, as we think about Jesus fulfilling Israel's calling, a lot of people read the Bible as if it were two separate books, almost entirely unrelated. They say, "Well, that was the Old Testament and we don't need to bother with that. We are a New Testament people." Or you hear folks say, "Well, that was the God of the Old Testament; but we worship the God of the New Testament Old Testament."

Do you know one of the earliest heresies in the church's history was one that tried to separate the Old Testament and the New Testament? To make Christianity a religion simply based on the New Testament and not the entire Bible, including the Old Testament. Do you know you can't understand the New Testament unless you see how the entire message and ministry of Jesus is rooted in the story of Israel and the Old Testament? Jesus is the fulfiller, the culmination of everything that Israel, and indeed, what the entire Old Testament pointed to. The apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 1:20 says, *No matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ*. In other words, all the promises of the Old Testament have found their fulfillment in Christ. Jesus said the same thing in John 5:39 in talking with the Pharisees. He challenges them saying, "You diligently study the scriptures because you think by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me." These Old Testament scriptures talk about me. After Jesus' resurrection he talked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus and we read in Luke 24: "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and the Prophets he explained them and what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself."

Jesus is in the center of the Bible. Whether you are reading in the Old Testament or the New Testament, the Bible is a book about Jesus. Jesus is the Temple that the Old Testament points to. So many people are excited about some new archeological dig at the Temple site in Jerusalem and the possible building of the Old Testament Temple. Jesus is the Temple. We don't need a new Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus is the place where we meet with God. As the glory of God dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament Temple, John tells that the glory of God dwelt and remained in Jesus. Jesus is our Holy of Holies.

Jesus is the great high priest who intercedes for us before the throne of God. We don't need a priest today to confess our sins to. Jesus is our priest. He is our mediator. Only his priesthood is eternal. His priesthood is perfect. Jesus is the final sacrifice that the Old Testament sin offerings and guilt offerings and burnt offerings pointed to. Only his sacrifice doesn't need to be repeated every day. It is a once for all final sacrifice. God is not looking for another sacrifice from you to pay for your sins. We have our only needed sacrifice in Jesus.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's purpose for Israel. But unlike unfaithful Israel, Jesus is the faithful Son who chooses to love and obey God. Jesus fulfills Israel's national destiny to be light to the world and to bring all the nations in the world to God. Jesus is Noah's Ark that saved God's people from destruction. Jesus is the ram caught in the thicket that God supplied in place of Isaac. Jesus is the patriarch Joseph, loved by his father, rejected by his brothers, sold to the Gentiles, unfairly punished, but eventually becoming the right hand man of the king, who accomplishes the salvation of many.

Jesus is Jonah in the depths for three days, but raised. He is Amos warning us about a coming judgment. He is Jeremiah weeping over the nation as he sees judgment coming. He is Ezekiel prophesying the Temple's destruction. He is Isaiah preaching comfort and good news to those in captivity. Jesus is the wisdom of the book of Proverbs. He is David's Lord in the Psalms. He is the Passover Lamb, the Day of Atonement, and the Sabbath Rest. He is the exodus from Egypt, the end of the Babylonian exile, the Kinsmen Redeemer. He is the servant of Isaiah 49, and the mighty God of Isaiah 9.

Do you get it? Everything – every prophet, every prophesy, every sacrifice, every bit of the law, every promise, every symbol – everything Israel was or ever hoped to be was fulfilled in Jesus, the servant of the Lord. It all points to Jesus. Jesus is the center. Jesus is the meaning. Jesus is the climax. Jesus is the culmination.

And friend, in our imitation of the servant of the Lord, we are called to live such attractive lives that people get drawn to God. Do you know, there is nothing more attractive than someone who puts themselves out to serve another person? Servanthood is the most relevant way that we Christians can impact our world today. The world is tired of power politics. It is tired of watching this group and

that group grab the levers of political power and try to dominate the rest of the world with its agenda. There is nothing more relevant and effective in drawing people to God than imitating the example of Jesus the servant.

We regularly find Jesus simply meeting people's needs. We find Jesus, even after his resurrection, cooking breakfast for his tired disciples. We see Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed, stripping off his clothing and wrapping himself in a servant's towel, washing his disciples' feet.

The people who have had the most impact for Christ in this world have been servants. I think of the worldwide response to Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa was incredibly vocal about her opposition to abortion in America and in the west. Her stand was very unpopular with Americans who wanted to be able to do sexually what they wanted to do without the consequences of an inconvenient, or unwanted pregnancy. But Mother Theresa's servant lifestyle made it impossible for people to dismiss her.

Let me use another illustration. Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world. Not too long ago there was a big furor about an AIDS patient who was admitted to a hospital in Nepal, but was thrown out when the hospital found out he had AIDS. This was reported on the front page of the newspaper there. But what the newspapers also reported was that there was one hospital in Nepal that opened its doors and welcomed this man with AIDS. It was a Christian hospital run by Christian missionaries. These missionaries are not permitted to evangelize in Nepal. But because they took the attitude of servants, huge numbers of people turned to Christ. 35 years ago it was estimated that there were only about 200 Christians in all of Nepal. Now there is about 1 million.

Let me make this even more personal. As a Jewish teenager, I was not won to Jesus by superior arguments, or by being overwhelmed by someone who was more dominant than me. I was won by a girl named Marlene, who took the attitude of a servant. She fulfilled her assignment by praying for me daily and by living before me such an exemplary life that I could not dismiss her. I saw in Marlene a goodness, a graciousness, a generosity of spirit to others. I saw in Marlene a willingness to be put out and inconvenienced, and to be put upon. And she did these things with such grace. She had qualities that I totally lacked. What drew me to Christ was that Marlene fulfilled her assignment of being a real Christian in action. And it caused me to ask the question: What makes this woman tick? Why is she like this?

Let me ask you something. Do you think anybody around you is asking what makes you tick? What is it that you have that they don't have? Do you think anyone is taking one more step towards God that they otherwise would not take because of you? Why not ask this Christmas: Whose needs can I meet? Yes you have your own needs. Yes your family had needs. But who outside of you and your family can you help? Who can you bless? Who is lonely that you can

visit? Who can you encourage? Who can you serve? Who can you model Jesus for? I tell you, it will be way more satisfying than getting another toy this Christmas. Is there anywhere you can volunteer?

The servant doesn't just fulfill an assignment, he is the assignment. He doesn't just bring grace, he is grace. He is salvation. Isaiah 49:6,

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Isa 49:6 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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

This passage is badly translated in the NIV that we use here at Vineyard. It reads: "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." The text in its Hebrew original is very different. That word "bring" is not what the text says. This was the translator's interpretation of the text. The text literally says:

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I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
That you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Jesus is not only the means by which salvation comes to the world, Jesus is that salvation. This is what the old man Simeon said when the baby Jesus was just 8 days old and brought to the Temple to be presented to the Lord and to be circumcised. Simeon said

Luke 2:25-32,

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Lk 2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Lk 2:26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Lk 2:27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

Lk 2:28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

Lk 2:29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.

Lk 2:30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

Lk 2:31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

Lk 2:32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

In your Bible focus upon these words in verse 30:

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Lk 2:30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

Jesus is not merely seen as the bringer of salvation. I’m not merely looking at someone who accomplished salvation. I’m not looking at the means of salvation. I am looking at someone who is salvation.

Friends, do you know that the New Testament constantly personalizes what we make impersonal? Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship with Jesus, the Servant of the Lord. See, Christianity is not about concepts or theories, or clever ideas. So often we Christians are confronted in the university setting, or in the workplace, or in the online chat room, with the argument that says: What makes you Christians think your ideas, your concepts about reality, your philosophy of life is better than the thousands of other ideas, concepts, and religions that everyone else believes and follows? We Christians often engage in debating our ideas and our philosophies of life trying to show how our ideas and our philosophies are superior to other ideas and philosophies.

But listen, what we Christians offer to people, what we invite people to embrace is not a superior idea. What we offer is Jesus. Simply Jesus. Bishop Stephen Neill, who was a scholarly missionary, said, “Our task is to go on saying to the Muslim with infinite patience – ‘Sir, consider Jesus.’ We have no other message.”

Our Christian faith is in a person. Our Christian faith is not about an idea. It is not about a theory. It is not about a philosophy, or a system of beliefs. Our faith is in a person – the Servant of the Lord.

You know, impersonal ideas have very little power to change anyone’s life. But the New Testament constantly presents us not with an impersonal, abstract idea, but with a powerful person. The New Testament constantly personalizes what we make impersonal. For example, in John 14:6,

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Jn 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me

As I said, impersonal ideas have very little power to change someone’s life. But if you encounter a powerful person, who is truth, it is absolutely shattering.

Let me ask you a question: Are you tired of lies and sales-pitches? Are you tired of religious hype, TV evangelists, spins, slogans, and sound-bytes? Are any of you looking for truth today? You know any who is looking for truth? Are any of you looking for something real, something solid to build your life on? Do you know anyone who needs a solid foundation to build their lives on?

Look at Jesus! Embrace Jesus. He is truth. He is life-altering.

Are any of you empty today? Are you successful financially, or academically, but unsatisfied inside? Do you really need one more toy this Christmas? Will a new MP3 player, or a new laptop really meet the thirst inside of you for something more? Jesus is the something more. He doesn't just bring life, he is life. He said: I am the way, the truth and the life. He said: If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

Friend, if you embrace Jesus, you are going to be embracing life. The New Testament says that what we are looking for, we find in the servant of the Lord, Jesus. Not an idea, just Jesus. 1 Cor. 1:30 says:

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1Co 1:30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Are any of you tired of self-improvement books and therapy, talk shows, Dr. Phil, and Dr. Laura? Are any of you seeking personal wholeness, personal restoration? You want to be more than you are. You want to be healed up. Are any of you looking for a sense of internal rightness? Then the Bible says to embrace Jesus. He is righteousness. He is holiness. He is wholeness.

Let me put it slightly differently. Jesus is like a live wire. If any of you grab hold of the unadorned real Jesus, you can't help but have your world rocked. So much of what the Christian Church has done in sharing Jesus, or in bearing witness to Jesus is put layers of insulation around the real Jesus. The Christian Church has become afraid of presenting the Jesus as we find him in the New Testament because encountering him is too raw, it is too unsettling. He is too shocking. The real Jesus, who is the servant of the Lord, upsets too many apple carts. He is too radical. So we wrap layer after layer of insulation around him and we turn him into a philosophy, a self-improvement program, a political platform, a slick-packaged message, one that can fit between commercials. And we wonder why there is so little life change when people embrace what we are selling. Why is there so little impact on real men and women?

When we take off the insulation, and we simply and plainly say that what we are offering is just Jesus, if you are looking for something, look no further than Jesus, the servant of the Lord. That is the service the world needs.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, who was a great church historian from Yale of the last generation, said this:

In this world of men, with its aspirations and its struggles...there appeared one, born of woman...to most of us...and his contemporaries he seemed like a failure. Yet no life ever lived on this planet has been so influential in the affairs of men. From it has grown the most nearly universal fellowship, the Christian Church, that man has known...

From that brief life and its apparent frustrations has flowed a more powerful force for the triumphal waging of man's long battle than any other known by the human race. Through it millions have had their inner conflicts resolved in progressive victory over their baser impulses. By it millions have been sustained in the greatest tragedies of life and have come through radiant. Through it hundreds of millions have been lifted from illiteracy and ignorance, and have been placed upon the road of growing intellectual freedom and have control over their physical environment. The life of Jesus has done more to allay the physical ills of disease and famine and any other impulse known to man. Jesus has emancipated millions from chattel slavery and millions others from thralldom to vice. Jesus has protected tens of millions from exploitation by their fellows. He has been the most fruitful source of movements to lessen the horrors of war, and to put the relations of men and nations on the basis of justice and peace.

Let me ask you a personal question. If you are a follower of Christ, how often do you find yourself talking with someone who does not have a relationship with Jesus at work, in your family, or at school, simply about Jesus? Or do you find yourself wrapping layers of insulation around Jesus? Talking about moral, political, religious issues, activism, and behaviors?

Listen, friend, moral, political, and religious debates have their place. But that is not what Christian servanthood is about. Our assignment fundamentally is to point people to Jesus. Jesus is the live wire. Jesus is the shocking alternative to every other viewpoint. Embracing Jesus changes people's lives. Friend, commit yourself to regularly mentioning the name Jesus. It is so simple, yet just the name of Jesus dropped into a polite conversation is like throwing a bomb in the room. That's why you avoid it and that's why I avoid it. That is why the enemy is working overtime to keep you from saying it.

We can talk about abortion. We can talk about gay rights. We can talk about democrat and republican politics all day long. But let me talk to you about Jesus. I am a servant of the Lord. And here is what my Master Jesus said. I am a servant of the Lord and here is how my Master Jesus lived. I am a servant of the Lord and here is what my Master Jesus did for me. Point to Jesus. When someone is hurting, point to Jesus. When someone is successful, point to Jesus. When someone is in need, point to Jesus. That is the greatest service you can render in this world. Turn people to Jesus. Let's pray.

Called To Be A Servant

Rich Nathan

December 11-12, 2004

Advent: The Oldest Christmas Songs

Isaiah 49:1-9

I. The Servant's Assignment (Is. 49:1)

II. The Servant's Attractiveness (Is. 49:3)

A. The Call Upon Israel (Is. 2:1-5)

B. The Call Upon Jesus (Is. 49:5,6)

1. To Fulfill Israel's Call

2. To Fulfill The Old Testament (2 Cor. 1:20; Lk. 24:25-27)

C. The Call Upon Us (Acts 13:47)

III. The Servant's Attainment (Is. 49:5,6; Lk. 2:25-32; Jn. 14:12; 1 Cor. 1:30)