

Text: Isaiah 49:1-7

Theme: **NAMED FROM THE WOMB FOR MISSION TO THE NATIONS**

The Point: Jesus Himself announces that He has come to be the Messiah, not only for Israel, but for all of God's wandering children of every land and tribe and tongue.

(Sections of the sermon marked in italics will be spoken by the presenter. Those in normal font will be spoken by the pastor, who speaks on behalf of the Suffering Servant, Jesus.)

Introduction: *For today's message, we are going to do something a bit different. We will look phrase by phrase at the Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 49 and in doing so the pastor will unpack each phrase as the prophet might have the Servant of the Lord speak. This Servant has been **NAMED FROM THE WOMB FOR MISSION TO THE NATIONS**, and we want to learn from Him just what it means for Him to bear that mission at His time and in ours as well. Listen now to words that I believe could be directly from the mouth of Jesus Himself.*

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! I, Jesus, want to call attention to something of vital importance, not just to the few folks gathered in Jehovah's pews today, but to people from around the world, from coast to coast, from sea to shining sea, in every occupied place on this planet. Here is a word that matters for every person whom I have ever created. That certainly includes the people gathered to worship in this place as well. Listen up! Pay attention! Do not sleep through this one, my people! For this message has to do with your eternal welfare. Where shall I start? Where did it all begin? Let's start here.

The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. From all eternity Yahweh, the Lord of all universes, issued me a call. As the only-begotten Son of the Father, I have basked in His love from all eternity. My birth was not the beginning of my labor. Long before the Virgin responded in the words, "May it be to me as you have said," I responded to the Father's call with a hearty "Amen! May it be to me as You have ordained!" Leaving the halls of eternal glory, which I shared with my Father, basking in His presence constantly, I emptied myself of all my trappings of deity and became a man, born in a most humble way. Even within Mary's womb, in fetal development, as my beginning mirrored each of your beginnings, I received a name, the name which, by the Father's gracious declaration, is above every name. "You shall call His name Jesus," said the angel to Joseph months before I was born. Naming a child is a priceless privilege, as all you parents know. My name embodied the mission to which I was appointed, "God saves" or "God is salvation." None but God could have accomplished what I came to earth to do. God's hand is behind every motion of this saving plan of His. I am His instrument – not of judgment, but of salvation.

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. I have been fitted, equipped and qualified by God Himself. My mouth is indeed a potent weapon, a two-edged sword, wielded to bring the Word of God to people who need to hear it. That Law Word cuts deep into the hearts that need to be broken and called to repentance. That Gospel Word brings the healing salve, the curative balm to souls that are broken and hurting and desperate for hope. I was hidden for a long time, even for thirty years after my birth, while we waited for the fullness of time to arrive. But all the while I was hidden in the Father's quiver, readied for the exact time when I would be launched. Like an archer's prized arrow, I was being polished and sharpened and prepared for greater service, for the fullness of the Father's salvation plan. Even as I grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, that plan called for me to be fully prepared.

And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But 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." God announced me as His Servant. Whereas Israel the patriarch (also known as Jacob, the heel-grabber) had been brusque and pushy, whereas Israel the nation had been unreliable and wavering, I became the obedient Servant that God had called me to be. In my thoughts, in my speech, in my plans, in my desires, in my actions, in every part of my life, the Father has been perfectly honored and glorified. Oh, there have been moments when I wondered what was next. When I sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane and agonized on the cross, when even the apostles seemed to throw roadblocks into my path of service, when I looked out over stubborn Jerusalem and its wayward pilgrim crowds, my tears flowed, and it seemed that the labor was in vain. When I came to the point of ascending to the Father's right hand, realizing that three years had yielded but a few more than one hundred faithful followers, all the labor may have seemed pointless. But that was only from a human perspective. When I remembered that "my cause is with the Lord," my heart was eased, and the challenging roads became passable. The prophets and apostles battled similar feelings of futility. Many of my servants, church workers and laypeople alike, have also come to the point of despairing that their labor was in vain, that they have spent themselves for nothing. But when they realize this experience is not theirs alone, that they are shoulder-to-shoulder beside me on their road of suffering, they have found strength to soldier on bravely for the kingdom's sake. When you realize that your cause is with the Lord, that you are pleading a righteous cause, then you are empowered to serve with renewed strength and energy. Success lies in the Father's hands, and He will give His Word success according to His purpose, and in His own way and time.

And 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 . . . I am about to give you a high and holy word from Yahweh, the Lord, your God. You may be honored by no one else, but if God gives you honor, that is all you need. The praise and acclamation of people shrivels up quickly. But the honor given by God endures for eternity. This God is the same God whose design for salvation included my formation in the womb. This is the same God who set me apart to be His Servant for the special work of calling the people of Israel back into His fellowship. This is the same God who has a plan for His rebellious creation. This is the same God who has made you Gentiles His children by baptism through faith in my name. This is the same God whose plan for saving His people has always been wrapped around me and my service. This is the same God who has honored me by speaking from the heavens, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This is the same God in whom I have found strength to serve you to the very end of life itself. No one else could command your attention as He can. Give close and careful attention to His Word. Here it is!

He 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." Even if all Israel had responded with hope and faith to the call to repent and believe the Good News, even if every descendant of Abraham had been united with me through trusting my promises, even if all Jewish people in every generation had been reborn by the Spirit and lived in newness of life – still it would not have been adequate to display the amazing, astonishing, miraculous love of the Father. No, He had much more in mind in calling me as His Servant. Oh, yes, He sent me first to the Jews, only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, first of all to the people of Abraham's clan. But even the rejection of many of those unfortunate folks would not hinder the march of the Father's incredible plan. I have also served as a light to the nations. People have walked with me through the harshest deserts of Mongolia and the Sudan, through the jungles of the Amazon and darkest Africa, through the streets of New York and Chicago and Rio de Janeiro and Moscow and Chennai and Hong Kong and Paris and Berlin and Rome, people committed to letting my light shine through them to the poorest and the most downtrodden, to the elite and the forgotten, to the educated and the illiterate, to all people in every land and nation and tribe and tongue. His salvation has indeed reached to the end of the earth. Praise His name!

Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers . . . And so is my Father primarily known as the Holy One, the Redeemer, Rescuer, Savior of those who wander in sin's deserts. He speaks to me as to one deeply despised. I have lived as one who is despised and rejected by men. I have lived as a man of suffering, acquainted personally with grief, haunted by death. The road to your salvation was no bed of roses. I have not lived in the lap of luxury or enjoyed what you might call the "good life." I was named by John the Baptizer "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." That defines my life like nothing else that could be said. Lambs in the Old Testament stood in the place of the guilty parties and died, though they had committed no wrongdoing of their own. And in the shedding of that blood God granted atonement, appeasement, forgiveness of sin. But all those lambs died as shadows of the one sacrifice that I would offer on your behalf on the cross of Calvary. I stood in your place and took your punishment as I took my last labored breath. My death has provided the sacrifice that covers the sins of every person, Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free, young and old, red, white, yellow, black, and brown. Do not turn your backs on anyone as beneath my service or beneath my sacrifice, for God so loved the WORLD that He gave me into death for all of you.

[These are the words of the Lord:] "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." It may hardly seem possible, but one day all kings and princes will bow down before me. That day is not far off, as some might suggest to you, but I will come soon to reclaim this world as my proper kingdom. Kings and princes are not mentioned here because they have some preferred access to me, but only because their inclusion will tell all people of the importance of this appearance. I have been chosen by the Father for this mission, which no one else could ever have accomplished. Because I love you and because I have given my life for you, I invite you to enjoy life while you live toward eternity. I look forward to our being together – forever! Live in the radiance of that joyful expectation, and let me love others through you today and every day.

Conclusion: *In the words of this lesson from Isaiah, Jesus Himself announces that He has come to be the Messiah, not only for Israel, but for all of God's wandering children of every land and tribe and tongue. That is the message which the church is called on to proclaim and to live out as it speaks God's Word in bold and courageous ways to all people everywhere. God's love is for all. His forgiveness is offered to every person without exception. And your love is to be reflective of His love for all those around you. May you know the Spirit's power for just that sort of life! In the strong name of Jesus, AMEN!*