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Isaiah 49:7-13

Seventh Message

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MORE THAN YOU COULD ASK OR THINK! THE LORD'S TESTIMONY TO HIS SERVANT

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

The theme of our study today in the second Servant Song, from chapter 49 of the book of Isaiah, is, What does God do with our shattered dreams?

A few weeks ago, I was reminded of one of my own unfulfilled dreams. My junior high-age daughter was playing softball with a number of girls, and some boys gathered to watch. The date happened to be October 26th, the same date my infant son died 15 years ago. As I watched the young people playing in the park, I wondered what it would be like to have a 15-year-old son by my side. Later that evening, someone on the television sang the song "Bring Him Home," from the stage show *Les Misérables*. The lyrics, a prayer sung by the hero, Jean Valjean, for his future son-in-law who was going into battle, seemed to articulate every yearning of my own heart 15 years ago.

God on high, hear my prayer.
In my need, you have always been there.
He is young, he is afraid.
Let him rest, heaven blessed.
Bring him home, bring him home.

He's like the son I might have known,
If God had granted me a son.
The summers die one by one,
How soon they fly, on and on,
And I am old, and will be gone.

Bring him peace, bring him joy,
He is young, he is only a boy.
You can take, You can give,
Let him be, let him live.
If I die, let me die,
Let him live, bring him home.

God did answer Jean Valjean's prayer. In the play, the father dies, and the son is brought home. Fifteen years ago, a group of people prayed this prayer through the night in our home, but in my case the boy died and the father lived. I remember feeling that night that I had spent my strength in vain; I would never be able to impart earthly joys to my son. For many of us, the approaching holiday season, far from bringing joy and celebration, only seems to intensify the pain of shattered dreams.

In our text today, we will see what God does with our shattered dreams. In Isaiah 49:3, the Servant recalls the Father's promise to him:

**And He said to Me, "You are My servant, Israel,
In whom I will show My glory." (49:3)**

The Servant's original task was to be everything that Israel was intended to be. He appointed twelve apostles, knowing that God was committed to the work that he was doing. But at end of his life, the Servant says, "I have spent my strength in vain." He could discern no order, no meaning and no permanence to anything he had done. Nevertheless he faced his execution on the cross, trusting that he had achieved what he was assigned to do. Though he was given no earthly glory, yet he knew he would be rewarded.

At this point in the text, the Servant has completed his testimony concerning himself. Now the Father takes the stand, and with the whole

weight of his Person (as the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, the Holy One) bears testimony regarding his Servant. These are the texts Jesus was alluding to in the gospels, when he said, "Even if I do bear testimony of myself, there is another greater than I who bears testimony of me." And the Father's testimony is that in the resurrection, the ministry of the Servant will take on a new, transcendent view. He would inaugurate a New Covenant, unlike any covenant ever made before in Israel.

Given the fact that we here have two confirming testimonies, and considering the weight of each of the Persons involved, contemplate the terrible judgment that awaits those who refuse to take their testimony to heart! We remember the words of Deuteronomy, quoted in the book of Hebrews, "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Heb 10:28-29).

Let us look then at the Father's testimony.

I. God will reverse the Servant's position (49:7)

**Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and its Holy One,
To the despised One,
To the One abhorred by the nation,
To the Servant of rulers,
"Kings shall see and arise,
Princes shall also bow down;
Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has
chosen You." (49:7)**

A. His initial reception on earth: Rejection

First, the Father bears witness concerning the reception which the Servant had while he was on earth. Jesus presented himself to the rulers of Israel as a king with a servant heart; but he entered Jerusalem humbly, mounted on the foal of a donkey. Rather than being received in honor and glory, however, he was "despised." The word has the idea of treating someone with contempt because he has no value or significance. "Abhorred" is the strongest term in Hebrew for rejection (from it we get the noun "abomination") because someone or something is ethically or ritually unclean. Perhaps Isaiah is giving us a hint of the terrible event of the cross, when Christ died, despised and abhorred, outside the camp, because he was considered to be under the very curse of God (Heb 12:12-13).

The Hebrew word for nation is the word *goy* (from it we get the word *goyim*, meaning Gentiles). Isaiah is hinting here that when Israel despised the Servant, and considered him an abomination, the nation lost its holiness.

I have visited Israel twice. On the first occasion, my tour guide was a veteran of the 1967 Six Day War. He related the glory of Israel's conquest of the Golan Heights and Jerusalem—how they took the conquered territories unto themselves, in other words. On my second visit we went outside the walls of Jerusalem, and there visited an Ultra-Orthodox community of Jews. They had quite a different view of the present state

of Israel. They referred to it as a “goy,” a Gentile state, because in their view, the land must be given to Israel by Messiah as a gift; it is not to be taken by force. This is what Isaiah is saying here concerning the nation of the Servant’s day.

The Servant is despised and abhorred. This was his initial reception by his own people.

But, God says that this initial reception will be absolutely reversed after his death.

B. His ultimate reception on earth: Revered and worshiped

“Kings shall see and arise,
Princes shall also bow down;” (49:7c)

This word about kings and princes is a reference to all nations and peoples. They will receive spiritual insight, and they will rise off their thrones to bow down at the feet of the Servant. He who served rulers in his lifetime will be the One who is served and worshipped in his resurrection. He will have overwhelming success among the nations.

The reason for this reversal is attributed to the faithfulness of God.

C. The basis for the reversal: God’s faithfulness to redeem Israel

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and its Holy One,...
“Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.” (49:7a,d)

The Lord spoke: “I will redeem Israel”; and the Lord acted: “He has redeemed Israel through his chosen Servant.”

God will act to reverse the role of the Servant. He who was rejected while on earth will be worshipped in heaven. And all this will come about because of God’s faithfulness to redeem his people, Israel, through his chosen instrument, Jesus.

Why this change? Why is someone who was despised and abhorred suddenly worshipped and honored? What happened historically to create such a sudden reversal? The answer lies in the resurrection.

II. God will authenticate His Servant by means of the Resurrection (49:8)

Thus says the LORD, “In a favorable time I have answered You,
And in a day of salvation I have helped You;
And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people,”
(49:8a,b)

A. God will save the Servant

These verses are referring to the resurrection of the Servant, the event which is the cornerstone of Christianity. God’s covenantal promise to the king finds its origin in 2 Samuel 7, where he promises that David will have a line of sons who will be kings in Israel. God committed himself to this line of sons in a Father-son relationship. When they would pray to be saved from death, God would hear and answer them. And this line will culminate with the King, the Messiah. This One would not be saved from death, but rather through death.

This commitment of God to the house of David is amplified in the Psalms, where the King prays from the grave,

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will dwell securely.
For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.
Thou wilt make known to me the path of life. (Ps 16:9-11a)

B. Establishing a New Covenant

God answers the Servant’s complaint and his prayer. He saves his King through the resurrection, and by this act establishes a new covenant, a new world order, through resurrection life, for his people. Paul uses this text in exactly the same way in 2 Corinthians: “And working

together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation, I helped you’; behold now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). What God has done for Christ in the resurrection is what he will do for you right now. Our time of service is over; the day of salvation is at hand!

Perhaps I can illustrate. Imagine you are part of a poor family, living in the 15th century, and you are in the midst of a severe winter. Your only source of light is candles; your only source of heat is firewood, and both are running out. Your situation is becoming desperate, so you pray to God: “Lord, provide me with heat and light!” But no provision is made. Your last candle is used up; the last fire goes out. Just then someone comes to the door to say that God has answered your prayer. You look around, hoping to see a stack of wood and a box of candles, but you see nothing. Then the visitor says, “God is going to do something new for you. He has inaugurated an entire new power source. It is called electricity, and you can avail of it even before it is invented in history. There is a new age dawning, the age of electricity, and you can have light and heat at the touch of a button. Are you interested?”

This is what Jesus offers in the resurrection—a new life, a new covenant, a new nation, risen from the dead.

The Lord will reverse the Servant’s position on earth, and through the resurrection will establish a new covenant for Israel.

III. The glory of the Servant’s ministry: All things new! (49:8b-13)

The greatness of the Servant’s ministry is described by comparing it to the work of great leaders of Israel in the past, Joshua, Moses, Solomon. There will be a new exodus, a new land, a new city, and in each case the Servant’s ministry will be superior. All of this will be accomplished through the resurrection of the Servant. This is the thought which the apostle Paul picks up in 2 Corinthians: “For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory which surpasses it” (2 Cor 3:10).

A. A new Joshua (49:8b)

“To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages;”

Following his vindication, the Servant will be like Joshua, who gave Israel the land, and defeated 31 kings in the process. But he will be greater than Joshua in that Joshua did not provide ultimate rest (Heb 4:8-10). He will “establish” (literally, raise up) a land and cause you to inherit “the desolate heritages.” Joshua gave the Israelites a land “flowing with milk and honey,” but the Servant will take a desolate land, a place that is so barren and ruined it is terrible to view, and make a new creation out of it. Joshua made the land holy for a period, but not the rest of the earth. Jesus, in contrast to Joshua, will make the whole earth holy.

There are hints later, in Isaiah 54:2-3, that this land will be much larger than the original borders of Israel. Her seed “shall possess nations”—not just the little land of Israel. And in the New Testament, the only references to land encompass the entire earth! Take Romans 4:13, for instance: “For the promise to Abraham or his seed that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Or Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” The apostle Peter makes reference to this in his letter: “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).

What does this mean to the believer living today? It means we do not have to be territorially-minded; we do not have to assert our rights. Imagine if the Jews in Palestine did this today with their Arab neighbors. Supposing they acted like Abraham. When Lot felt there was not enough land for his and Abraham’s flocks, Abraham offered him his choice of where he wanted to settle. He saw that the land was a mere

shadow of the heavenly city, which is what he desired. What if we acted this way at work? Someone else covets your next promotion, and you tell him, "Take it. I've got a better one coming in the heavenly city." Christians do not have to be territorial regarding their inheritances or their possessions.

B. A new Moses (49:9-10)

**"Saying to those who are bound, 'Go forth,'
To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves;'" (49:9a)**

This Servant will be like Moses, who set the prisoners free from their physical bondage in Egypt. But unlike Moses, who could not set the people free from their sin (Deut 9:6), the Servant will say to the leper whom he had cleansed, "Go forth and show yourself" (Mark 1:44), but he will also say, "Your sins are forgiven" (Mark 5:5). Because he is greater than Moses, the Servant will do what Moses could not do. John comments, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). We are all lepers, in a sense, but with a word, the Servant can cleanse us and release us from darkness.

The rest of verses 9-10 alludes to the time when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, and provided food and protection for them:

**"Along the roads they will feed,
And their pasture will be on all bare heights.
They will not hunger or thirst,
Neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down;
For He who has compassion on them will lead them,
And will guide them to springs of water." (49:9b-10)**

Like Moses, the Servant will be a faithful Shepherd who will provide supernatural food and protection in a wilderness. But unlike Moses, this food shall endure unto eternal life. (John 6:32,35; 7:37-38; 2 Cor 3:7; Rev 7:16-17). Moses was the meekest and most compassionate of men. In the wilderness, he shepherded a nation of murmuring and arrogant people. But, rather than striking out at them, he was forever interceding for them that God would have mercy on them and save them.

Meeekness and compassion are the dominant characteristics of the Servant. The word "compassion" is the Hebrew word for the womb, signifying the love bond which a mother has with her newly-born infant. She is eager to act in compassion for her helpless child whenever she is needed. This is how the Servant sees those who love him. We are always helpless and needy, but he never drives us or harshly rebukes us; he never whips us or abuses us in any way. On the contrary, he gently leads us to springs of fresh water, and feeds us from his banquet table. This is what Moses did for the Israelites in the wilderness. He supernaturally fed them with manna from heaven, and gave them water from the rock. But here, in the words of Jesus, is what happened to all those people: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh." (John 6:49-51) The Servant is a better deliverer, a better provider, a better protector than Moses.

This shepherd's compassion will continue over into the new heavens and new earth: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of waters of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev 7:16-17).

We do not need to be territorial, nor do we need ever to feel confined. No circumstance in this life can confine or restrict the Christian. The transcendent God will come to you in your wilderness, and set before you a feast of protection.

I took a book of poems with me when I went to Romania this past summer. One of the brothers there, Daniel, drew illustrations on the themes of my poetry and mailed them back to me. One poem compared the founder of the Christian movement, Traian Dorz, a Moses figure who gave birth to a spiritual people, and spent 16 years in prison for his labors, with Ceaucescu, the tyrant who plundered and robbed the country. Daniel illustrated this poem with a drawing of a prison window, its iron bars shattered, with an ink well and a quill set in the center. Even in a cruel Romanian prison, the transcendent God is not confined. Neither was his servant. Traian Dorz wrote 10,000 hymns to Christ during his imprisonment, and today those hymns form the worship manual of the movement which he founded.

What was true of a prison cell can be true of a home where children are abused, it can be true of a tyrannical work place, a serious illness, or an outbreak of war. In the Servant we are never confined or restricted.

Thus, the Servant's work is better than that of either Joshua or Moses.

In the next verses we will see that he is better than Solomon.

C. A New Solomon who will build a New Zion (49:11-12)

**"And I will make all My mountains a road,
And My highways will be raised up.
Behold, these shall come from afar;
And lo, these will come from the north and from the west,
And these from the land of Sinim."**

Solomon built Zion, the City of God, with materials which he gathered from all over the world, and people came from everywhere to see what he had built. Three times each year, Jews were required to make the journey to Zion to celebrate the Holy Feasts. But the mountains were always a great obstacle on their journey; they were fraught with danger and peril. That is why the pilgrim says in Psalm 121:1: "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From whence shall my help come?" But in the days of the Servant, the mountains will no longer be obstacles to worship of the Lord. Why? It is because worship has nothing to do with geography. The heavenly Jerusalem has descended to earth, and the shadows are dispensed with. That is why Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father...But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth [in contrast to places and symbols]; for such people the father seeks to be His worshipers." (John 4:21, 23). Now there is a new Zion, a heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), being built by the Servant, where all physical obstacles are removed. And when two or three gather in His name, he is in the midst of them (Matt 18:20). The mountains are no longer obstacles.

And, further, this city is inclusive of all peoples:

**"Behold, these shall come from afar;
And lo, these will come from the north and from the west,
And these from the land of Sinim."**

Sinim is "modern Aswan, ancient Syene, a district on the southern frontier of ancient Egypt. This shows that a universal salvation of all Israel is in view" (Bruce Waltke). A tiny remnant of Jews were living in that far corner of the earth, but God was saying to them, "Though you are far, far away, I know you, and I am going to call you home." But the vision is expanded way beyond the Servant's original task, for not only will he regather Jacob from all corners of the earth, as he does so, all the nations will respond to the glory of this One. Glory be to him! No wonder Zechariah declares, "In those days ten men from all nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech 8:23).

The song ends where it began. The Servant opened by beckoning those from afar, and the Lord concludes by guaranteeing that the Ser-

vant's desire will be fulfilled; people from all over the world will come to worship the Servant in the New Zion.

How wonderful it is to watch God orchestrate his salvation! I have found one of the most profound examples of this to be Mitali, a young Indian woman from Bangladesh, who was at Stanford University when I was college pastor at this church. One summer, she traveled to Germany to study with a group of Stanford students, and a few of them who were Christians shared the love of Jesus Christ with her. She thought deeply on what they had shared with her, and she began to feel spiritual conflicts stir within her as she compared what they told her with what she had been taught in the Hindu religion. The group later visited Russia, and one day went to view the great Leningrad Museum. The director of the museum, a man who spoke 18 languages, was a Christian, and on that day he led the tour of the museum. At one point he looked directly at Mitali, and said, "Something is troubling you." She replied, "Yes, there is something. I'm troubled about the person of Jesus Christ." As the tour progressed, this man spoke to her in Bengali, her own language, and addressed issues like atonement, predestination, forgiveness of sin, etc. While the rest of the group were being guided around the museum, and informed by the director, Mitali was coming home; she found Christ. She later returned to Stanford, married a Christian man, and they both became missionaries of the gospel. God had taken her around the world so as to orchestrate her coming home.

The Servant is greater than Joshua, greater than Moses, and greater than Solomon. He is bringing people home from all parts of the earth. He is greater than Joshua, for his land, a new creation, is the ultimate rest. He is greater than Moses, for he calls us out of our sin so that we might show ourselves clean indeed; and he gives us the food which does not perish, but which endures to eternal life. And he is greater than Solomon, for his city has no geographical obstacles, nor internal divisions, and not one soul is lost.

IV. Our response to the Servant's ministry: Shout for joy! (49:13)

A. For a new creation (49:13a)

**"Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth!
Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains!"**

Isaiah gives the command to rejoice at the miracle God has done. Paul also says that the redemption of God's people does far more than redeem a people, it inaugurates a whole new creation: "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God...that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:19, 21).

B. For a new and restored people (49:13b)

**For the LORD has comforted His people,
And will have compassion on His afflicted.**

The Lord has not only restored his people, but in the process has brought salvation to the whole earth.

I have but one exhortation: Do not receive this grace in vain! For thousands of years the Jews have been praying for candles for light, and wood for heat, but God has already blessed them with electricity. Let us not receive his grace in vain!

Although my son did not come to my home, but instead went to the Father's home, God has done more for me than I could ever ask or think. He has blessed me with many spiritual sons. Four years ago, Earle Canty, who is a Jew, met me here in church to receive Jesus Christ into his life. Earlier this year, this man whom God had sought and brought

home, traveled with his wife, Jolyn, to Romania, and there they adopted a little boy, Samuel Mihi. Last week we had a party for Samuel, and as we celebrated I could not help but think how I have been blessed with many sons.

I will conclude by reading to you a poem, inspired by this second Servant Song, in appreciation of my own son.

BRING HIM HOME

In appreciation for my son, David Jonathan Morgan
"The beloved gift of God, born by the sea"
October 26 – November 4, 1975

God on high, hear my prayer
In my need, you have always been there.
He is young, he is afraid,
Let him rest, heaven blessed
Bring him home, Bring him home.

A voice is heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
And she refuses to be comforted,
Because they are no more.

"Return your voice from weeping
And your eyes from tears
For your work shall be rewarded," declares the LORD,
"And your children shall return to their territory."

But I have spent my strength in vain.
What chaos is this, that your life perfected in secret,
Returns to the dust before I could reward you with earthly joys.
"O my son David, would I had died instead of you."

Grief bore a window into my steel heart,
Ache became light's channel of another place.
Now I long to be where you dwell, knowing
I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.

You made my soul a lyre,
And placed in it new strings,
To play a tune of broader range,
Than can be ever sung on earth.

I cannot sing the song yet,
But in my wanderings as a stranger here,
The God of Mt. Moriah has lifted the veil
And for a few moments I have stood there.

What I have seen the eye cannot tell,
But over the horizon my heart has heard,
You singing in harmony with the Son,
Not alone, but in a symphony of boys.

God on high, heard my cry, "Bring him home,"
He brought Him home,
Not my home, but His,
Not one son, but many.

So I am content to continue my journey here,
Not begetting but adopting
The orphans of every race
To join the procession Home.

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