**Isaiah 49 vs. 1-13 Rev. S. de Marie**

Ps. 138: 1, 2

Ps. 119: 46, 57

Read ~ Mathew 11: 25 - 12: 21; Romans 10: 16-21; 11: 25-27

Ps. 136; 1, 2, 9, 12, 13

Text ~ Isaiah 49: 1-13

Hymn 21: 2, 3

Ps. 84: 2, 5

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ

It's advent. At this time we remember the preparation for the birth of the Lord Jesus. Particularly as He was announced in the Old Testament.

How well do we know the Old Testament?

If you pay attention to the words of the Lord Jesus and His apostles, you will notice how often Isaiah is quoted, although sometimes briefly referred to only as ‘the prophets‘.

Isaiah is also quoted very often in the Revelation (to John).

We learn to know the Christ in his prophecies! There He comes to you and speaks to you.

I may proclaim you God's Word from Isaiah 49 under the following theme:

The Servant of the Lord comforts God's people in exile with His coming as the Savior

1. His coming

2. His assignment for Israel

3. His commission for the Gentiles

**ONE**

The circumstances in which Isaiah prophesied were by no means positive ones.

There is great decline in the church under King Ahaz. The king and the people serve the Baals and pay little attention to God and His commandments.

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Isaiah must prophesy the threat of exile to them. Yet his prophecies are also full of salvation promises. The Lord will save a faithful remnant in the coming judgment. The name Isaiah means the Lord is salvation, Redeemed by Yahweh.

While the exile still has to take place, Isaiah is allowed to pass on rich promises of return. Yes, even of the coming of the Messiah. This applies in particular to chapters 40-66.

The new beginning that the Lord wants to make with the return from Babel becomes a prelude to the coming of the Messiah.

In four (different) prophecies the coming Messiah is called the servant of the LORD.

Our text is the second of these

In verse 1, the Servant Himself speaks: He calls very forcefully upon the whole world to listen to Him. “*Listen to Me you coastal lands, you peoples from far away”.*

Everyone must listen to the Messiah. His precious and wonderful message does not only concern Israel but all nations. Covenant children and Gentiles.

His gospel, His good and joyful message gives redemption to anyone who wants to hear it and who may believe it. There is hope for Israel which must experience the punishment of exile because of its many and serious sins .

There is hope for the faithful remnant, who undergo much oppression.

There is also salvation for the lost ones who repent,

Even pagans trapped in the darkness of unbelief now hear of mercy and salvation.

*“Listen to me.”*

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, when we hear such a call in the Bible, “*Listen to Me*,” then *we* must listen extra carefully. Here comes a message that you should not miss! The Servant says:

*“The LORD has called me from the womb,*

*from the womb, he has called my name.”*

His name is the name of Servant. Verse 3: “*He, God, said to me, God's Son, You are My servant.”*

This name of servant has a message in it. The Messiah, the Christ, will not come as a servant of the Lord God on his own initiative. He does not come with his own plan or goal. No, God's Son, the Messiah, will be sent by God the Father. When He comes, according to Hebrews 10 verse 7, He will say:

“*Behold, I am coming - in the scroll it is written about Me - to do your Will, oh God.”*

The servant of the LORD will obey God's will, God's counsel in full obedience. He also testifies of it on earth Himself. The Father sent Him with a divine commission. Again and again Jesus points to the Father who sent Him.

The Pharisees and scribes did not want it, but they could have known.

Servant is not the same as slave here. No, the basic word for "servant" also means "child". This servant is connected to Father. He is the only begotten of the Father. God's chosen, the beloved in whom God is well pleased.

This is what Isaiah 42 says about the servant. That is also how Jesus reveals himself later in Matt. 12: 18 with words from Isaiah. God's Son is going to carry out and fulfill God's will, carry out and fulfill God's counsel, as the Father's chosen and beloved servant.

Jesus did not receive the command from the Lord God only (when He was) on earth. verse 1 says:

*“The LORD has called me from the womb,*

*from the womb, He has called My name.”*

His calling was already there before He was born,

At the incarnation God gives His Son everything needed for His ministry .

This prophecy (from Isaiah) is mainly concerned about His office as Prophet and Teacher.

He will speak divine Words. God prepares Him for that. Verse 2:

*“And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword…*

*And made Me a polished shaft;*

*In His quiver he has hidden me“.*

Everything shows that God the Father and Christ are one.

God the Father is with Him. He gives Him everything.

*“In the shadow of His hand he has hidden Me.”*

God preserves Christ to fulfill his commission.

We see this especially in the rescue of the newly born Jesus from the murderous hands of Herod, and in keeping Him from the murderous blows of the furious Jews.

So that Jesus can complete His work of salvation in God's time.

In verse 8 the Lord says: “*I will preserve you*.”

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, all the work of the Lord Jesus Christ has been devised by the Triune God, whereby the Father sends the Son, and gives Him everything necessary. God does all this in His time.

In doing so, He answers the prayers of all who have begged for His coming. Also the prayers of the Servant himself. But with God nothing happens by chance, or without thought, or uncontrolled, or untimely.

Galatians 4: 4 speaks of the fullness of time when the Messiah comes. The time was full and that means that God led everything and made everything work together so that the Messiah had to be born just at that moment, as God had determined.

Verse 8 mentions that time: “*In an acceptable time, . . . in the day of salvation.”*

Yes, the time of (God’s) good pleasure, also called the acceptable year of the Lord, comes when the servant, our Lord Jesus Christ, is born.

It is the time of grace, the time of God's sovereign good pleasure.

The day of salvation, of redemption, the time that the LORD announces in verse 8 becomes reality with that appearance.

And later when Paul examines what the coming of Christ entails, also for his time, he quotes Isaiah 49 verse 8 in 2 Corinthians 6: 2:

*“Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”*

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, let us also, confirm this with amazement.

God has proclaimed this a long time before. And He has fulfilled His promises. The Lord Christ, has come from the Lord as the Servant. And He has fulfilled his entire commission. See this as God's pleasure, God's mercy, God's redemption and salvation which you may receive as a believer

The question is, do you see, do you also see our time as the time of God's good pleasure? Do you see that for your own life and for the church? If you can state this with amazement, then there is reason to have joy in the Lord every day for everything that He gives you in His Son.

But congregation, then we, at the same time, look forward to the day of Christ's return.

God's pleasure and salvation will be completely fulfilled on that day. That day will also come in the time determined by God. He and His Son, on his right hand, are making every effort to come to that day. Speedily and without delay, at God's time. That is our comfort.

**TWO**

The Servant of the Lord comforts God's people in exile with His coming as their Savior. We first saw: His coming, We now see second: His assignment for Israel.

The Lord Jesus comes to earth as the promised Messiah with a very special commission. He comes to redeem His own, His people.

The faithful remnant at the time of Isaiah and (also) in (the) exile may hear this to their comfort. They have a difficult time with (those) gentile hostile powers.

But they are also not beloved of their own people. What (troubles) haven’t the prophets in particular suffered from and in the church! Yet with the return from exile in view, there is a glorious prospect.

The Messiah, which was already promised in Paradise, will come in God's time.

He will crush the head of the serpent. He will triumph over the devil and his followers.

But He will also make God's people walk in God's ways again. As a Servant of the Lord, he will provide a new covenant, of which Jeremiah also spoke.

And above all: through His servant God will regain His honor!

In verse 3 the Servant is addressed as "Israel." That may sound strange. But the Servant, the Messiah, represents Israel as a people of God. He will also reconcile them to God as the Mediator of Israel, so that Israel will again be pleasing to the Lord. Yes, so that the Lord God will delight in His people again. (We read in) verse 3: “*You are My servant, Oh Israel, in Whom I will be glorified.”*

God sends his Servant in order to reconcile Israel to God, to bring Jacob back to Him.

But congregation, take note of the word "Himself" in verse 5. God's servant is there for God.

His goal is that the Lord God wants to glorify Himself in His people.

So it is for Him, it is to His delight and honor that His people are brought back to Him.

Congregation, have you ever thought of that? That the purpose of Christ's "reconciliation work" also means that God glorifies Himself in you as His child and as His bride, His people. He is your Husband, your Maker. You are His glory.

The Israel of verse 3 is the true Israel. The faithful Israel that believes and loves God.

The people who accept, and want to follow Christ, and thus want to live to the glory of God.

The Servant wants to cause Israel to return to that relationship. That means their conversion.

The LORD gives His servant, the Messiah, also as a Covenant for the nations, says verse 8. That Covenant points to the reconciliation that the Servant will give. He will shed His blood on the cross as the blood of the new covenant.

The Servant Himself is called a "covenant" here. That is how closely reconciliation and restored communion with the Lord is connected to His Person.

For Israel, no covenant with the Lord has been possible outside of the Christ.

This is also the message, the glorious gospel that the Servant must convey.

He does that here as a prophet and teacher. Later in Chapters 50 and 53, His priesthood becomes more emphasized. But here, in verse 2, we also hear how He will speak;

*“And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword…*

*And made Me a polished shaft.”*

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So the word of the Savior has great power. The question is whether this only points to his struggle against the opponents. The Bible says that the breath of Christ's mouth will kill the adversary. A single word from Him can fell the adversary.

Yet according to Heb. 4 the Word of Christ is also alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, and it penetrates to the separation of soul and spirit, from joints and marrow, and it judges the deliberations and thoughts of the heart. In other words, Christ's gospel forces you to choose for or against the Christ.

His Word is also the victorious word of Revelations 6. It goes around the world as if on a white horse, as a horseman bending his bow. He goes out conquering and to conquer with the Gospel.

Sword and arrow thus represent the two effects of Christ's preaching, namely punishment to perdition or repentance to salvation. Simeon said the Lord will be for a fall and for a rising. If you clash and keep clashing against His word, you fall, you are lost. But if you surrender to His Word then you can rise to a new life.

The word of Christ works close by as a sword and from afar as an arrow. It knows no boundaries. It knows no borders, it even goes over (all) the world.

Now, congregation, that's how the Servant, the Messiah came to his people, but that's (also) how He comes to you and yours. With His Word. We don't see Christ. But He always comes to you in the preaching of the living Word. With the sharpness of a sharp two-edged sword. So powerful and so sharp! His Word is still like a flying arrow that penetrates deep into your heart. How then do you receive this Christ?

Do you accept Him? Do you open your heart to His word?

Do you seek refuge with Him? Would you also repent of your sins?

Congregation the word of your Savior goes deep, it wants to conquer and transform your heart. But then, when there is faith and conversion, there is also a wonderful effect.

Because for you, reconciliation with God through Christ means that everything will be good again between you and the Lord. He gives you eternal life.

Isaiah may also bring this over to Israel. The work of the Servant leads to a kingdom of peace. A realm where there is prosperity and abundance.

Isaiah paints that in verse 8 with images that are reminiscent of the return from exile. How all the good things in the land come back as possession, verse 8b

How the prisoners are released on the command of the Servant of the LORD. Read in verse 9a:

*say to the prisoners: Go forth!*

*and to those who are in darkness: show yourselves!*

Prison and darkness point to the miserable desolate situation of living in sin.

Congregation, listen to the voice of the Servant as the voice of a good Shepherd who also says to you;

Get out! Get out of the prison of your sins and all your misery.

That misery is there if you do not acknowledge and love God's Son, if you do not honor God, if you are not reconciled to Him, if you continue to follow your own sinful ways.

Get out of that prison that leads to death.

Go out, that is: be reconciled by this Christ who wants to bring you back to God.

And Christ also says to you in His Word: come to light!

Because if you accept Him sincerely and want to follow Him and His Word, yes then you may come from the darkness to the light.

To the life of a wonderful fellowship with Him and God the Father.

Then you will be transferred to the realm of light and grace!

Therefore congregation, listen to Christ and come forth, come to him and see how wonderful His gospel is.

With conversion Israel may experience the riches of the kingdom of light; it is described in visual language how everything now changes .

Where there used to be destruction, aridity, baldness, hunger and thirst, there are now green verdant meadows and fountains of water.

Verse 10: *They will neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them. For He who has mercy will lead them, even by springs of water He will guide them.*

Congregation, this is the image of the good Shepherd, who leads and pastures his sheep.

The picture of eternal life with God.

Then all of God's promises will be fulfilled. It will be fulfilled in heavenly salvation. In Revelation 7 it is described how the believers are doing, those who have been oppressed on earth but have fallen asleep in their Lord. We read precisely these words of Isaiah there:

*They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;*

*For the Lamb who sits in the midst of the throne will shepherd them*

*and lead them to living fountains of waters.*

*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

 (Rev. 7: 16, 17)

The Servant is called the Lamb, Who is glorified and sits in the midst of the throne.

**THREE**

The Servant of the Lord comforts God's people in exile with His coming as their Savior. We saw His coming and His mission for Israel.

We now hear as the third and final point: His commission for the Gentiles

Isaiah was allowed to bring a wonderful gospel. For the Jews then and also for us (today).

Yet his prophecy also contains a very sad and disconcerting message about Israel. Verses 4-6 is concerned with this.

First the Servant tells for what purpose God is sending Him to Israel (verse 3), namely to glorify Himself in Israel. God's mission and purpose is therefore very rich, particularly for Israel. But then the Servant expresses his great disappointment.

He says in verse 4: “*Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain.”*

His glorious message that comes to the people with the power and sharpness of sword and arrow, will not find any headway in most of his own people.

The Servant now points to Himself: I, I said.

God's plan and His commission are wonderful, but My work on Israel is for nothing, useless, in vain. Finding no faith with His own people, Christ is disappointed, like the vinedresser of Isaiah 5 who finds no fruit, regardless of His toil, his zeal to fulfill God’s commission.

Yes, the zeal for the Lord God has consumed Him. Still no faith (is apparent)..

How is that possible? We hear the same in John 1.

*“He came to His own, but His people did not receive Him“.*

The Lord Jesus Himself stated it in Luke 13:34: “*Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!”*

Israel has tripped over Christ as over a stumbling block.

In another place of Isaiah, God speaks about the attitude that Israel will reveal:

*“All day long I have spread out my hands to a disobedient and contradictory people.”*

The Jews have rejected Christ and his gospel, they have crucified Him.

The majority hardened themselves: they did not see their sins, because God hardened their hearts.

So, congregation, the complaint of the Servant goes very deep. The glorious Messianic gospel of redemption and eternal glory is rejected by His own people. And He is Himself scorned. Yes, God therefore calls Him : “ *…whom man despises, …whom the nation abhors*..” (verse 7)

That is how far Israel went against the Messiah sent by God.

In chapter 50: 6 we read more about that horror. There the Servant says:

*“I gave My back to those who struck Me*

*My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard:*

*I did not hide my face from shame and spitting.”*

And in the well-known chapter 53, the Servant is pictured as the Man of Sorrows,

*“He is despised, and rejected by men,*

*A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*

*He was despised and we did not esteem Him.”*

But congregation, the Servant does not stop speaking. He knows that this too is part of His commission. He knows that if He also endures this, God will glorify Him.

God will give Him the power to do so, verse 5.

And that is why He says in verse 4b:

*“. . .Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God“.*

God's command was to bring Jacob back to Him, but Israel did not allow itself to be gathered. Does God's plan run stuck?

No congregation. That is precisely the great mystery. The wonder that we cannot understand. The ways of the Lord are higher here than our ways.

For then the Lord goes to the Gentiles. Then He is going to fulfill His promises to Abraham. That Abraham would be a blessing to all nations of the earth.

That is the greatness of the gospel. God is no longer going to limit His salvation to Israel, but is now also going to address all nations. In verse 6a He says:

*“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved ones of Israel.*

That is, the Jews who were allowed to return from exile, they will be brought back to God by the Christ. But that is not enough for God.”

In view of the rejection and contempt of His servant by many of His own, God is now extending salvation to the whole world. Verse 6b reads:

*“I will also give you as a Light to the Gentiles*

*That You should be my salvation to the ends of the earth“.*

The light is the gospel of salvation, it is the deliverance from the darkness of sin.

The light is true life with God through Christ's Atonement.

That light is now also for the Gentiles.

God gives a wonderful sequel to that. He causes even kings to acknowledge His Servant and honor Him. They will bow down and serve Him.

For the sake of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.

Congregation, see here also for yourself the great mystery that was once hidden but became a reality at Pentecost, that the gospel goes out all over the world. That it reaches the great and the small on earth. You too, can hear it now! Accept Him and Come to Him.

Yes, for this too Christ had to come to this earth.

For this too He had to suffer reproach.

Not only on the part of his people but also on the part of the gentile rulers, Pilate and Herod. He also died on the cross for that to take away the sin of the world.

To be a light to you, to salvation, to blessedness. To redemption and eternal life.

Through Him, many Jews and Gentiles will come to faith and turn to the Lord. Even from distant lands. Together they are the true Israel, the church of the new covenant. The people who are comforted by the LORD with the sending His Servant, the Messiah. as the Light of the world. As the Savior of those trapped in the misery of sin and guilt.

You, too, can hear and know:

Whoever believes in Him will never hunger and thirst, but may receive eternal life.

That is reason for the highest praise from heaven and earth. Verse 13.

Everyone, including you, are called upon to praise and honor God and His Son forever. For God has comforted His people, He will have mercy on His poor.

Congregation, hear how the Christ comes to you in this rich Gospel.

Make sure you do not reject him who speaks (Heb. 12).

But accept Him and glorify your God.

**Amen.**