

Isaiah 49:1-6. Jan 10 2021. Introduce the reading of the verses with...

- The first thing to note, in order to understand what we read here, is: Who is speaking?

It's God the Son, Jesus. This is an Old Testament section that presented ahead of time the work of our Savior. And in this case, it is spoken from His voice. He is the one at the opening saying, "Listen to me." And you'll see that reality, that it is Jesus, come out very quickly in the rest of what He says.

- He is the one with a mouth like a sharp sword here. Think about what truth that is conveying. His Word is able to cut to our hearts, exposing sin and our need. But His ultimate intent, through His Word, is to bring healing: to work and preserve faith in Him in our hearts.
- He is the one who is the Lord's servant here. He came to serve, not to be served. He came to save the lost – you and me.
- Other specific details that fit His life are laid out:
He was set apart before birth,
He was born in time of a woman,
He was "hidden" – this fits how He set aside His glory, lived in our shoes – lived as one of us, with no majesty or beauty to draw us to him (Isaiah 53:2).
- As you listen for those things, we'll focus especially in our further time at the sermon on the truth of Jesus as *the Light of the world*. That's the culminating point in our section of Isaiah in front of us.

Read Isaiah 49:1-6.

Listen to me, you coastlands.

Pay attention, you faraway peoples!

The LORD called me from the womb.

When I was inside my mother, he mentioned my name.

² He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.

He hid me in the shadow of his hand.

He made me a polished arrow.

He concealed me in his quiver.

³ He said to me, "You are my servant Israel,
in whom I will display my glory."

⁴ But I said to myself, "I have labored in vain.

I spent my strength and came up empty, with nothing.

Yet a just verdict for me rests with the LORD,
and my reward is with my God."

⁵ But now the LORD,

who formed me from the womb to be his servant,

to turn Jacob back to him,

so that Israel might be gathered to him,

so that I will be honored in the eyes of the LORD,

because my God has been my strength—

⁶ the LORD said:

It is too small a thing that you should just be my servant

to raise up only the tribes of Jacob

and to restore the ones I have preserved in Israel,

so I will appoint you to be a light for the nations,

so that my salvation will be known to the end of the earth.

Sermon

It's a place some of you may have seen. Maybe some of you have even climbed it: Oak Island Lighthouse. Oak Island lighthouse once held the distinction – did you know this? – of being the brightest lighthouse in the United States. Something like 14 million or 17 million candle power is what I saw described. It has been seen at over 20 miles out to sea.

Its purpose? To call direction to travelers in the dark.

But here's the thing I want you to consider. What do you do when there is more than one light – like the many lighthouses up and down the Atlantic coastline – and only one of those lights is showing your way home? Only one is shining the way you should follow. The others would have you end off track.

I bring this up, to get you to think about the religious landscape in our world. Many competing messages claim to show the way – claim to be the way – to salvation, life with God forever. We might picture them, then, like different lighthouses; but only one is correct. Only one leads to God. And if you follow the other lights, they don't direct toward - but away from - God's home in heaven.

Let me give you an example, and in the process give you practice seeing this important reality.

A video was put out last year in the lead up to Christmas. And now with two holiday seasons, it has almost 4 million views (as of 1-9-2021). It makes you feel like you're along for the trip with Mary and Joseph – and there with the shepherds – and watching the Magi. At least that's the way I took it in. It traces the events of the nativity of Jesus. It's 17 min 20 seconds of gripping videography. |

Can 17 minutes of excellent visual retelling of these events be tarnished in just a few seconds time, and more than that, be leveraged to give a confusing message, even deadly?

Well, I want you to assess that. Here is what is presented at 17 min and 20 seconds. These are the only words in English for the whole film. These three short statements appear on the screen in fairly quick succession:

- “Jesus of Nazareth... went about doing good.” – Acts 10:38
- This Christmas season, so can you.
- Light the World (one by one)

And so think this through: in the video you are taken from Jesus' birth, to Jesus did good, to “do good. Light the world.”

What errant message does that leave someone with? | As far as one's relationship with God, what is the message of that video? What is one left to think about why Jesus came? | If all you have is Jesus as an example of going good, and you and I should do what He did, we're in trouble. If God's holy expectations remain left for us to achieve or live up to (in any measure), we are doomed.

But that's not the Christmas message at all.

And so you see, even some who talk about Jesus' birth miss the meaning behind why Jesus came.

Go from this one example, back to the bigger scene: the landscape we face in our world has many competing messages, claiming to show the way to salvation. Only one is the true way.

A “Truth in Love to Mormons” response to the video I describe earlier shared...

- If “Light the World” is all we have, we are left with failure. We fall short.
- Know that Jesus is “the Light of the World.”
- There is a big difference between the message “Light the world” and the truth that Jesus is “the light of the world.”
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2724294511131018>

We're told in Isaiah 49:6:

⁶the LORD said: It is too small a thing that you [Jesus, God the Son] should just be my servant to raise up only the tribes of Jacob and to restore the ones I have preserved in Israel, so I will appoint you to be a light for the nations, so that my salvation will be known to the end of the earth.

Along with Jesus as the Light of the World, especially look today at the description and truth: servant. Jesus came to save. And in order to accomplish that, He served. Isaiah in the section right after this, ch.50-53, really highlights that.

Trust in Him. He is God the Son who came and lived for you. He lived a perfect life for you. He took the punishment of every sin for you. He has done everything needed. Trust in Him as your way to a restored relationship with God. Then you have peace with God and life eternal – all through what He has done for you and me.

Think of all we have, all we gain, with the truth of Jesus as the Light of the World shining brightly to light our days ahead...

1) We are warned of the messages packaged as from God, but which lead to hell instead. Only one light is the way to heaven. It's interesting how this same truth and imagery is seen in the next chapter of Isaiah. This is Isaiah 50:10-11:

“Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. But now all who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires... But from my hand this is what you shall receive; you will lie down in a place of torment.”

Only one Light is the Way to heaven. Don't follow other offers that mankind has come up with.

2) And this very truth is what God uses to stir us in genuine concern for others who are presently following misleading beacons. As opportunities arise, we can shine the light of Jesus to others. Think of this role like that of the moon, like how the moon serves. The moon can give us light, though it is not the source of the light it is giving. The light is all really originating from another place, another power - the sun. So it is with us as Christians. Jesus is our light. As that shines on us, we get to reflect that truth to the world: He is the light of the world.

You know, I'm growing to appreciate more and more about lighthouses as I learn little things I had not known before. I had known that each light house has a unique paint design on it – the colors and the pattern of them each distinct (swirling stripes, black and white diamond shapes, etc.). So someone out on the ocean during the day can tell one lighthouse from another, and see the direction they want to go.

But I didn't know this until just recently. Or I forgot it, if I had learned it previously. Each light house has a unique light signal, which distinguishes it from the others at night. Cape Hatteras flashes a white light every 7.5 seconds. Cape Lookout every 15 seconds by comparison. And Oak Islands is 4 one-second flashes every 10 seconds. So those out on the ocean in the dark can tell one from the others.

And that's important when someone wants to follow the way that brings them home. They don't all show the way home. Only one. The others would have the person end off track.

Isaiah 9:2 tells us: “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.” Jesus is our great light.

Jesus is the light for you and me. This world is dark. We ourselves are dark. We stumble around, and if left to ourselves we'd end up only off track.

Jesus shines as the Truth. And yes, when you and I are in the light of Jesus, in the Light of God's truth, we will see our sins. God's Word reveals them to us:

the cutting words you've spoken;

the selfish ways you've acted and hurt others, or the ways we've failed to act and left others hurting;

the priorities you've placed over God, or the desires you've followed instead of following God's good ones.

This is good when we are brought to see our sins, and led to confess. It's a guard against giving sin a foothold in our hearts, a guard against our sinful nature re-exerting its sway or control.

The light shining on us shows our lost condition and helplessness. But in the light of God's truth we also see our Savior – Jesus is the Light of the World. He fills our need for forgiveness. He is our righteousness. He is our way to heaven.

Jesus, continue to keep us ever in your, with faith resting in you, walking in your light. Amen.