

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen in on a Remarkable Conversation!

1. *The Father speaks*
2. *The Son reacts*
3. *The Father speaks again*

Hymns: 87 – 85 – Distribution: 577, 314
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All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Isaiah 49:1-7 – 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. 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. He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”

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.”

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— 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 is what the LORD says— the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: “Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

Are you familiar with the expression “Being a fly on the wall?” You might hear someone say, “I wish I could have been a fly on the wall in that room!” The sense of the expression is that you wish you could have discreetly been present when something very interesting was happening, so you could hear the conversation.

Where would you like to have been a fly on the wall?

- Would you have liked to sit in on a big meeting from history? Perhaps at Appomattox Courthouse as Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee met at the end of the Civil War? Or perhaps when the “Big Four” met at the end of WWII? Or when the Declaration of Independence was signed?
- Would you have liked to be a fly on the wall when celebrities were gathering for momentous conversations? Maybe when the Beatles were breaking up? Or to hear the fallout of a big Hollywood couple breaking up?
- Would you have liked to listen in on the locker room pep talk before the Super Bowl? Or for another classic game from history that you remember? How interesting it would be to be a fly on the wall!

Today we have the chance to listen in on a conversation that is more important and profound than any of those. In our Old Testament reading for today, which serves as our sermon text, God gives us the jaw-dropping opportunity to listen in on a conversation between the Father and the Son. This is surprising to us because we hear specific plans and feelings going through their “minds.” And we don’t consider it eavesdropping, because God has had it recorded through the prophet Isaiah for our reading today. **Let’s recount what Isaiah wrote long ago, and listen in on this remarkable conversation. We will hear:**

1. **God the Father speak**

2. God the Son react

3. God the Father speak again

1 — We read in Isaiah 49: *“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. 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. He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”* This is the “Servant of the LORD” telling us what God the Father has said to him. Who is this Servant and what did the Father tell him?

The first detail that the Father speaks of is the Servant’s calling. The Father himself has called him from the time before the Servant was born. The Servant would be born to fulfill an eternal purpose. It reminds us of what God said about Jesus long before Jesus was born. After the first sin, the LORD God said to the serpent, the devil: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* (Genesis 3:15) Many prophecies were made throughout the Old Testament about the Servant of the Lord, such as one earlier in the book of Isaiah: *“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son and will call him Immanuel, which means “God with us.”* (Isaiah 7:14) God the Father commissioned the Servant long before he was born!

We also hear God the Father speak of how he will equip the Servant. He will “make his mouth like a sharpened sword” and he will make him into a “polished arrow.” What did God the Father mean when he told his Servant these things?

We know what the “sword of the Spirit” is. The Apostle Paul spoke of this when he described the armor of God. He revealed that it is the Word of God. We hear the same thing in the book of Hebrews, which says, *“The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

(4:12) This becomes quite clear when we also remember what the New Testament says about Jesus. John 1 says, *“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”* Jesus is the Word become flesh and spoke God’s Word faithfully during his earthly ministry. In John 14 Jesus said about his teaching, *“These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”* If you’re familiar with the vision John had of Jesus in Revelation 1, he recounts, *“In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword.”* It’s clear who this individual is!

Notice that the sword is “sharp” and the arrow is “polished.” These tools are in good repair! Do you have tools? Some of you probably have quite a few! If so, you know how tools that are not taken care of get rusty and dull. Maybe you’ve pulled a tool out that you hadn’t used for quite a while and it needed some attention. Or you found that hammer you lost in the backyard long ago, and it’s really a rusty mess.

This does not describe the Servant of the Lord! He is a sharp sword. When he spoke God’s message of law and gospel, he cut to the core. He spoke directly and appropriately. He pointed out sin clearly and skillfully. He pulled no punches, but condemned the sinner’s actions and told where unrepented sin led – to hell. He also proclaimed God’s grace perfectly to the repentant sinner. He revealed himself as the Servant and Savior sent from the Father, and promised forgiveness and salvation to those who confess their sins and put their faith in him.

Not only is the Servant equipped like this, we also hear the Father tell him that his is “hidden” in his hand and concealed in his quiver. God the Father would reveal him and send him when the time was right. The Father would determine when the “fullness of time” was and send him into the world to do his work at just the right moment in history.

As we sit like a fly on the wall and hear these things the Father has told the Servant, how amazed we are!

2 — As Isaiah continues his writing, we now see how the Servant, the Son of God, reacts to what the Father has told him. We read,

“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.’ ”

Do those words surprise you? After all, we’re talking about Jesus Christ here. Who can ponder this great mystery? Should God experience rejection and be plagued with thoughts of failure? Should God speak as one who is experiencing depression and facing the hopelessness of another day spent working for nothing? These words are a good reminder to us that Jesus truly took on our humanity when he came to this earth. It reminds us of what Hebrews 4 tells us: *“He was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”*

Think about how these words of Isaiah were fulfilled in the life of Christ:

- In Luke 12 Jesus said, *“I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!”*
- Hebrews 5 recounts, *“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”*
- We recall the time Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan and afterwards needed angels to come and minister to him.
- We recall how he preached a very difficult sermon to understand about how he was the Bread of Life and John wrote, *“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ‘You do not want to leave too, do you?’ Jesus asked the Twelve.”*
- We remember his anguished prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he asked his Father to take the bitter cup away that he had been given to drink.

- We recall his words on the cross: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

Jesus was tempted to despair, but he did not sin. He expresses his trust when he says, *“Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand, and my reward is with my God.”* He says, *“I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength.”* He knew the outcome was in his Father’s hand. He knew that by his ministry he would bring “splendor” to God the Father. He called it “glory” in John 17: *“(Jesus) looked toward heaven and prayed: ‘Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you... I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.’* We see a similar thought progression as Jesus gave his life for our sins on the cross. He called out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* yet later, when the time had come for him to die, he prayed, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*

As we sit as a fly on the wall and hear Jesus’ thoughts, what an example this is for us. We cry out to God with our doubts. We are tempted to despair when we face difficult circumstances. We feel like a failure. But as the Son of God himself entrusted his work to his heavenly Father and knew God would work his results, we do the same. We put our trust in God, who will work out all for our good.

We also take comfort in this example of Christ as a church. There are days when our labors as a congregation in this sinful world seem useless. Perhaps outreach to the community doesn’t garner huge results – or any? Maybe financial concerns at a difficult time in our country’s history tempt us to despair. Perhaps we wonder, “Is it really worth it to struggle on?” At a time like that we need to be reminded of what Proverbs 16 says: *“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The LORD works out everything for his own ends— even the wicked for a day of disaster.”*

As we sit as a fly on the wall, we learn from the Son’s words that God the Father will work for our good and for his plan through us.

3 — One more thought remains in this conversation. The Father speaks one more time. 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 is what the LORD says— the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: *“Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”*

What more does God the Father have to say? He tells the Son, “You will shine as a Light farther than the people of Israel. You will shine as the Savior of the world! You will be the Savior of the Gentiles too.” This reminds us of the words our text opened with, as a call was made for the “islands” and the “distant nations” to hear. Was this a novel idea? Did it need to be said? It certainly was not new. When God promised a Savior to OT Abraham, he said that “all nations” on earth would be blessed through him. Yet as God made specific promises to the nation of Israel, the thought grew that only they would experience the benefits of the Messiah, or that at the very least they were a “cut above” others. God the Father reveals here that all people are saved on equal status before him through the Savior.

The final detail the Father reveals in this conversation is that he will exalt the Son. Although rejected as king by his own people and by tyrants, *“Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down.”* This is reminiscent of the first Epiphany account of the season, where the Magi from the east come and bow down in their regalia before the boy Jesus. It also reminds us of what God the Father does to exalt his Son because of his faithfulness as the Servant. Philippians 2 says, *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Revelation 1 says, *“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every*

eye will see him, even those who pierced him... So shall it be! Amen.”

As we sit as a fly on the wall, we see that God the Father will have the last word, as he brings about the salvation of all people and exalts his Son to his rightful place as King!

As we come to the end of this remarkable conversation, our minds might be spinning. After all, that happens when God gives you a glimpse of what he’s thinking. What can we take away from this conversation we have heard? There are great mysteries here in these words from Isaiah, but what is the biggest mystery of all? The biggest mystery is that God has done all this for you. Why would he do that? Why would he show grace to you? As a wayward child, why would he do it? As one who needs to be cut down by the sword of the Spirit for your sin, why would he do it? God has shown remarkable love and grace in his plan to save you. Why?

We don’t have the answer to that question in this conversation we have listened in on. As a fly on the wall, we don’t hear that answer.

Perhaps you haven’t heard anything new in the plan of God for our salvation in these words. But hopefully, being a fly on the wall has given you a new perspective on his love and his plan to save us. As we close our look at this conversation in Isaiah, may we marvel at the mystery. May our minds be blown away that God has loved us so much. And may our faith in him be strengthened as we see what he has planned for us! Amen.