

Celebrate the Epiphany of God's Chosen Servant!

Isaiah 49:1-6 January 18, 2020 Pastor Robert Hein

Introduction: To you husbands out there, have you ever been sent on a mission to get some items at the store, but failed miserably? Got the wrong brand, wrong size or forgot to pick up some key ingredient? Maybe you had to go back and try again, or perhaps they sent someone else in your place to complete the job right, or maybe your spouse had to go get it done right herself.

God has servants to whom he assigns a special purpose and mission as well.

Some of God's servants have also failed to carry out their purpose as God assigned it.

But there is one chosen servant who carried out his assignment perfectly, and that is God's Son Jesus Christ.

Theme - Today we are going to focus on the successful mission Jesus completed for our benefit, as we celebrate the Epiphany of God's Chosen Servant.

That expression "**God's servant**" can apply to different people at different times in the Bible.

Basically God's chosen servant is someone whom God has entrusted with a special calling and purpose.

We start at the dawn of Creation with **Adam and Eve**. They were God's original chosen servants. God created them in his own image as the crown of his creation. They were created to serve God in harmony and holiness as his dear children.

God then gave them an opportunity to practice their free will with his command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Honoring God's will by avoiding that tree would have been a beautiful way for Adam and Eve to express their love and gratitude to their Creator, and fulfill their God-given purpose.

But instead, they misused their free will to sin. They broke God's command and ate from the tree he had declared off limits to them.

That first sin destroyed the perfect harmony and holiness they enjoyed with God.

It brought misery, death and destruction to our world and to each and every one of us

God's Word teaches, "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people for all have sinned." **Romans 5:12**

Yes, Adam and Eve failed to carry out their God-given mission, so God had to send someone to fix what they had broken. That someone was God's chosen servant who we now know to be Jesus Christ our Lord. His assignment was to redeem or buy back God's wayward people from sin, death and the power of Satan.

Now God's promise of a Savior was entrusted to another chosen group of people, the Children of Israel. In the Old Testament they too were called to be God's chosen servant.

God revealed the high calling of his chosen people Israel at Mt. Sinai when he declared, "You yourselves have seen what I did in Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." **Exodus 19:4-6**

Yes, the children of Israel were God's chosen people in the Old Testament, called to be a holy nation

God set them apart from the sinful world around them that they might live holy lives to his glory

They were privileged to carry and pass on the promises of the Savior

They were called to glorify God by their words and actions

God also made them a light to the Gentiles - to draw sinful people to the light of God's truth and the promises of the Savior

But, sadly, once again, God's servant Israel failed to carry out their God-given purpose. Instead of remaining faithful to God's Word, the Israelites adopted the sinful practices of the unbelieving people living around them. Instead of living holy lives, they committed physical and spiritual adultery, worshiping the false gods of the Canaanites. Instead of remaining faithful to God's Word, their religious leaders corrupted the truths of the Bible and the promises of the Savior, so that by the time Christ arrived, the truth of the Bible was almost unrecognizable. Think about it! The spiritual leaders of the Sanhedrin at the time of Christ were Pharisees and Sadducees. Sadducees didn't even believe in miracles, angels or the resurrection, and Pharisees taught the people that you earned your way to heaven by doing good works. They had completely corrupted and abandoned God's truth and their high calling. They failed miserably in their God-given assignment. The Israelites also became very proud and elitist. They had no desire to share the promises of the Savior with their unbelieving neighbors. Instead they believed they were superior people and looked down on everyone else. Yes, rather than letting their light shine, they succumbed to the darkness. They were given a high calling as God's chosen servant, but they failed to carry it out.

Well in our devotion today from Isaiah 49, we hear of another chosen servant of God. But where others failed, he succeeded in carrying out his God-given purpose. This chosen servant of God is **Jesus Christ our Savior**.

In Isaiah 49 he reveals the special purpose for which God sent him into this world.

Jesus himself is speaking here when he says, “

1 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD (that is God the Father) called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.

3 He (My heavenly Father) said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.” 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 my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

Here God the Father calls his Son Jesus “my servant Israel”, but now he is not referring to the nation of Israel, but rather to the promised Messiah who would spring up from Israel's line.

Husbands may come back from their shopping trip missing something important or messing up the order, but here Jesus Christ, the chosen servant of God, promises to carry out his God-given assignment perfectly.

Isaiah's prophecy also reminds us that Jesus' coming was foretold in the Old Testament and announced by angels. Even before he was born, a heavenly messenger revealed his special name and high calling. He declared to Joseph, “Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21

During his earthly ministry Jesus did everything his Father asked of him, everything he was chosen to do. He checked every item off God's list.

Keep all of God's law perfectly in our place – check

Defeat the temptations of the devil- check

Crush Satan's head – check

Preach God's Word faithfully and fulfill every prophecy of the Messiah – check

Pay for our sins on the cross – check

Redeem us from sin, death and the power of the devil – check

Rise from the dead to make his victory plain for all the world to see- check

Yes, Jesus did it all, perfectly, exactly as planned.

As Jesus himself once declared, “Father, I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” John 17:4

For a time however, it might have appeared Jesus would fail.

In our devotion from Isaiah 49, Jesus says, **“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand, and my reward is with my God.”**

Now just what is meant by these words?

Well, to the casual observer, it might have appeared Jesus was going down to bitter defeat during Holy Week, when Judas betrayed him and his disciples deserted him. All appeared to be lost when Jesus was rejected by the Jewish leaders, condemned by Pontius Pilate, and then nailed to a lowly cross.

It looked like Jesus had labored in vain, that his mission was a failure, but that wasn’t the case at all.

Actually it was through his suffering and death that Jesus completed his assignment and won the victory for us. When Jesus declared, “It is finished!” on that cross, he made it clear that he was going out a conquering hero with his saving mission accomplished.

A familiar Easter hymn puts it this way, “The foe was triumphant when on Calvary, the Lord of creation was nailed to a tree. In Satan’s domain did the hosts shout and jeer, for Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear. But short was their triumph; the Savior arose, and death, hell and Satan, he vanquished, his foes. The conquering Lord lifts his banner on high, He lives, yes, he lives, and will nevermore die.

Yes, Jesus carried out his assignment flawlessly, for our benefit.

And then God the Father himself voiced his approval of his chosen servant Jesus on several occasions. At his baptism and anointing, marking the beginning of his public ministry, he proudly declared, “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.”

He declared it again at the end of Jesus’ ministry on the Mt. of Transfiguration, “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.”

And he said it again dramatically on Easter Sunday morning, when he raised Christ from the dead. Not with words, but with actions, he declared once more for all the world to hear, “This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased!”

Yes, we can be assured that our heavenly Father is well pleased with all that Jesus, his chosen servant, accomplished on our behalf. All is well between us and our heavenly Father

Our debt of sin is cancelled,

Our separation from a holy God is removed.

We now enjoy life as God’s redeemed children, with a bright future and a glorious eternity awaiting us in heaven.

But not only has Jesus redeemed us from the guilt and the power of sin, he has also redeemed us **for** a life of service to him.

Yes, we are saved to serve and we are privileged for a purpose.

Today we enjoy the privilege of being called God’s chosen servants, in whom he displays his splendor.

Back in the Old Testament the Children of Israel enjoyed that special calling

Today, that privilege is ours!

The Apostle Peter reminds each of us, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” **1 Peter 2:9-10**

There is your assignment for life – declare the praises of him who call you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So how can you do this?

First of all, make your whole life a life of thanksgiving to God!

Come worship your Lord with joy regularly! Sing his praises! Confess his holy name!

Pray without ceasing!

Cherish God's Word, study it regularly, and Put it into practice!

Yes, honor God's Word by avoiding all that is sinful and evil and striving to do what is good

Bring the Lord your generous offerings on a regular basis as a joyful act of worship

Then dedicate your time and talents to his glory, in your personal life, in your daily vocation, and in the ministry of our church

And help spread the good news of Jesus to others!

Remember, in our devotion God said it is too small a thing for Jesus simply to restore the tribes of Jacob. He also made him a light for the Gentiles, that his salvation would reach to the ends of the earth.

Jesus loves all people. Jesus died for all people, and Jesus wants all people to hear the Gospel and be saved. He wants his salvation to reach to the ends of the earth. Today Jesus privileges us to play a part in carrying out that assignment,

Old Testament Israel was called to be a light to the Gentiles, but they failed to carry out their purpose. Instead they became proud and self-serving. They only thought about themselves. Don't be like them!

Instead as God's chosen people, let's work together as brothers and sisters in Christ to share the love of Jesus with the unchurched people of our community and all around the world through our support of the ministry plan of our congregation and the home and world missions of the WELS.

Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus revealed himself to be the promised Messiah, God's chosen servant. He did all things well for our saving benefit!

Now it is our great joy and privilege to live for him who died for us.

Remember, you are blessed, you are called, you are chosen for a special assignment.

Join with me as Martin Luther spells out our high calling in his explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles Creed.

"All this Christ did that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness...This is most certainly true! Amen."