

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Isaiah 49:1-6 Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar.

The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. ² He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. ³ And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." ⁴ But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God." ⁵ And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him-- for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength-- ⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

✝ One Little Word Can Fell Him ✝

Being a born-and-bred northerner living here in Central Florida, I've noticed quite a few differences in dialect. From the way words are said, to the vocabulary used, there are just a lot of differences. And the way these things work, I've always assumed I have no accent at all, that it's the others who talk funny. But down here, if I visit a store full of Polk County natives, I'm the one that sticks out when I speak. It's happened on quite a few occasions, all I need to say is even just one word and they'll ask, "Where are you from?"

It only takes one word. That's true if you're a northerner living in the south; it's even more true if you're the Lord's Suffering Servant. In our text before us this evening, the Servant of the Lord speaks and says, "**He made my mouth like a sharp sword.**" This isn't the only place in Isaiah where the prophet describes the power of God's tongue in such a way. In Isaiah chapter 11, he points forward to the coming Messiah, the one who would be the "**shoot from the stump of Jesse.**" (1) There he says this One will "**strike the earth with the rod of His mouth.**" (4)

Unlike the Persian King Cyrus, who would deliver the people of Israel from Babylon, but just waged war against Babylon in the normal fleshly way, the Servant of the Lord speaking in our text, employs weapons that St. Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 as weapons that are "**not of the flesh but that have divine power to destroy strongholds.**" Now, as we live in a world where might makes right and in which the rise and fall of nations generally are determined by who has the biggest guns, prophetic pronouncements and the power of the Word may seem like feeble pieces of equipment.

But in Isaiah chapters 40-55 which we've been focusing our Lenten meditations on, the power of God's Word is highlighted throughout. In chapter 40, "**The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.**" (8) In chapter 55, "**For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for**

which I sent it." (10-11) And in chapter 50, Jesus speaks through the prophet and declares, ***"The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary."*** (4)

The truth is, when God speaks, things happen. And it only takes a word. We can see the power of even just one word in our daily lives. If you pull up to one of those red, octagonal signs on the side of the road, it only has one word, "STOP," and everyone obeys. A parent shouts to a child dragging their feet, "NOW" and those feet start moving much more quickly. A bill comes in the mail that says, "DUE," and we pay now. In these and many other instances, it only takes one word!

Writing to the Israelite Exiles, Isaiah presents this power of God's Word. And they needed the reminder. Their temple, the pride of Israel, had been burned and demolished. Their king Zedekiah was forced to watch as his sons were killed, before the Babylonian invaders gouged out his eyes and led him away in chains into exile. Judah's entire way of living had come to a brutal end by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. These exiles had forgotten about God's powerful Word; they only knew defeat. The refrain of the time is summarized in Isaiah chapter 40, ***"My way is hidden from the LORD ; my cause is disregarded by my God."*** (27)

If you've ever been abandoned by a loved one, you've felt those words. If you've ever been hurt so badly that you felt the pain down in your core, you've shared in the Israelite nightmare. If you've ever fought the demons of your past, you know the chaos in Israel during those days.

Overcome by life in Babylon, the exiles started looking for relief. They turned to the fleeting pleasures, the temporary successes, the quick fixes. They were so bold as to say in Isaiah 56, ***"Come, let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure."*** (12) In other words, they're a lot like us today. In the agony of defeat, so often you and I get sucked into what is shallow, superficial, and dirty. Looking for quick revenge, spouses get tangled up in affairs. Students take shortcuts and are caught cheating. Parents neglect their children to pour all of their energy into their careers. What's the result? We find ourselves despairing as exiles. ***"My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God."***

Enter Jehovah's Suffering Servant, who says in our text, ***"He made My mouth like a sharp sword."*** Just one word will set right what is so wrong with our lives. To quote from the Ethiopian eunuch who speaks to Phillip about this same Servant, ***"Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else? Then Phillip told him the good news about Jesus."*** (Acts 8:34-35) Jesus is the Servant in our text who needs only one word to accomplish His Father's mission and bring order to a fallen and shattered world.

Anointed by the Holy Spirit at His Baptism, Jesus is thrust into the wilderness to meet the enemy. Every time he beats back the Devil's temptations, He does so with one powerful word: ***gegreetai***, which is one word in Greek; in English it means, "It is written." During His ministry, as he went out to the "bruised reeds and smoldering wicks," like the man with leprosy, His one word was ***katharistheti!*** Which is again, just one word in Greek, in English it means, "Be clean." One word and the man was cleansed. When the winds and the waves threatened His boat, just one word: ***Siopa!*** "Be quite." To the deaf and mute man, He had one word: ***Ephphatha!*** "Be opened."

Again and again, we see the power of just one word from our Servant/Savior Jesus. Luther put it this way, ***“This world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none, He’d judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him.”*** Or consider the confession centurion in Matthew 8; he gets it right when he says to Jesus, ***“Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”*** (8)

And in the climax of human history, Jesus would again cry out with just one word. Isaiah sets the stage in chapter 50: ***“I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting.”*** (6) Arrested, bound, tried, slapped, beaten, stripped, scourged, abandoned, forsaken—in that moment He had one more word: ***tetelestai!*** In English, ***“It is finished.”*** (John 19:30)

All that the prophets of the Old Testament had foreshadowed and foretold was now complete, done, finished. The serpent was crushed. The Lamb was slain. The atonement was made. The Passover was complete. The eternal banquet is now ready. And now, looking to Christ’s cross, we find God’s one-word descriptions for us: forgiven, washed, cleansed, justified, loved.

But the final restoration is still yet to come. At His second coming, the Servant will return as a rider on a white horse. His name will be called Faithful and True and King of Kings and Lord of lords. On that day the ultimate one-word victory will be uttered and we will finally come home. John records, that one word in Revelation 21:6: ***gegonan!*** “It is done.”

To the student who holds defeated dreams, He speaks. To the couple with a barren womb and fervent prayers, He speaks. To the Christian who daily fights against the flesh only to lose time after time, He speaks. To any person who has felt the sting of death, He speaks.

And so we speak back to Him, “Lord, just say the word, and we will be healed.” Thanks be to God for His powerful Word. Amen.