



Epiphany 3
January 18, 2026
Isaiah 49:1-6

Don't Make Jesus Small

Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the Lord called me;
from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.
² 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.
³ He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
⁴ But I said, "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."
⁵ 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—
⁶ 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."

Let me show you something. This may you remind you of a *Seinfeld* episode. But this is a tip calculator. If I go to the restaurant and they don't put that little 15%, 18%, 20%, 25% table on the bottom of the receipt, I can pull this contraption out. Look for the little icon that looks like a calculator. Put in the total for my bill, then hit times, and put in 20%, then hit equal, and *voila!* I know how much to leave for a tip.

Okay, okay. Obviously, this thing does such more than just figure out how much to leave for a tip. Could you imagine what a waste it would be to spend \$30, \$40, \$50/month for a "tip calculator" plan. But do we ever do that with God? Do we make him so small that we fail to utilize all of his functions? Is your God or what he does, too small for you? That's what God warns about. "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." *Too small.*

Before we unpack that thought, let's look at the context. If Isaiah 49 was dropped in our laps, it may be confusing to figure out who's talking, who's being talked to or who's being talked about. What further complicates it is that the original is written poetry. So think about how difficult it can be to decipher song lyrics. That's similar to this. In fact, these verses are sometimes called, "The Servant's Song."

You look at verse three and it says, "You are my servant, Israel." So is he talking to his whole chosen nation. Or since Isaiah is writing, is he the "I" or "me" in this section? Fast forward. When missionaries Paul and Barnabas embark on their first mission trip in the New Testament, they quote Isaiah 49:6, saying it was their job to be a light to the Gentiles. So is this talking about the New Testament church? Or is it simply talking about Jesus? When he was forty days old, his parents took him to the temple where a man named Simeon took him into his arms and said, "Now I can die in peace. Why? Because my eyes have seen your salvation... a light to lighten the Gentiles." So who is this talking about? The answer is, "Yes."

That's often how Old Testament prophecies work. They have multiple fulfillments depending on their perspective, which can be frustrating, but it also shows the unity of Scripture and how, ultimately, they are the Scriptures which testify about Jesus. When God established his Old Testament people, he promised Abraham, "Through you all nations on earth will be blessed." That promise was and could only be fulfilled in Jesus. When Paul preached the message of salvation to non-Israelites, that was only possible because of Jesus. So, let's look at these verses through the lens of Jesus' eyes and listen to it from his lips.

Hear Jesus say, "*Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.*" The more I celebrate Christmas, like we just did a few weeks ago, the more I appreciate that this baby in the manger wasn't just a baby born of a virgin who would die on the cross and rise again from the dead. We're so quick to look ahead to see what Jesus would accomplish as the Savior of the world. But don't neglect to look back. Before Jesus was born, the LORD -- which you could say is God the Father in this case -- the LORD planned this all out. Jesus wasn't an oops-child. He was planned. Not by Mary. Not by Joseph. But by God himself.

That doesn't mean the plan wasn't threatened. When God's people were slaves in Egypt, the Pharaoh tried to kill every boy to wipe out a nation. Later, God's people were attacked by the Assyrians from the north and taken captive by the Babylonians. Read through the Old Testament, and you see war after war, rebellion after rebellion, famines and famines, yet, God always preserved a remnant of his people, keeping the plan in place. Granted, the plan wasn't always evident. Jesus says he was like an arrow concealed in a quiver for thousands of years. But no matter the threats from the outside or the rebelliousness of God's own people, the LORD was going to stick to the plan. He was committed to sending his Son no matter what. Just a sidebar thought, find great comfort that. If God says he's going to do something. He will.

But God's plan wasn't just to send Jesus to earth. A successful birth -- mission accomplished. God's plan was for Jesus to rescue his people. So when he deployed his Son, he didn't send Jesus into the field without weapons. Through Isaiah, Jesus says, "*He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.*" You see that play out in Jesus' life. Think of one of the first battles we see Jesus fighting. Shortly after Jesus steps onto the public scene at his baptism, he heads out into the desert and the devil is firing all these temptations Jesus' way. "C'mon. Use your power to serve yourself. Turn those stones into bread. C'mon, see if God's promises are really true. Throw yourself off this temple. Or, c'mon, enjoy life. Look at all these riches. Just enjoy life and bow down to me." Every time the devil attacks, Jesus counterattacks with the sword of God's Word.

Or see how Jesus wields that sword in his preaching. Numerous times we hear people react with amazement, "We've never heard someone speak with such authority." His words were able to cut through all the false teachings that were so prevalent. He cut through this idea that somehow you'd be saved because of your bloodline instead of what you believed. He cut through the idea that you could earn heaven by trying your best or at least by being better than someone else. He sliced through tradition and pierced through pride to the point that people were cut to the heart, finally realizing that left by themselves they would eternally die. The sharp sword of God's law convinced them they needed a Savior.

But not everyone came to that conclusion. In fact, some of the people closest to Jesus fended off that sword of Jesus. Consider the priests and spiritual leaders of Jesus' day. They didn't just reject Jesus' words, they rejected Jesus himself to the point that they had him crucified. As he hung there, carrying out God's plan, what were people doing? Mocking, jeering. Or you think of how many times people -- his disciples included -- thought Jesus should be restoring an earthly kingdom instead of a heavenly one. Could you imagine how deflating all this could have been for Jesus. "Is it worth it? Is anybody even listening to me? Why did I even bother? *I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all.*"

It's then that Isaiah lets us overhear the Father's heart toward his Son. "*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.*" Can you picture it? God the Father putting his arm around his Jesus, "Son, I get your frustration. It pains my heart, too, to see your own people reject you. I understand how you might think your work is in vain. But let me assure you, it's not. I didn't send you just for the neighbor across the street or your classmate at synagogue. That's too small. To use the illustration from before, you're not just a tip calculator. You're a powerful, all-purpose device meant for far more than we can ever imagine. I didn't just send you to save a few. You, Son, are the light of the light of the world, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Jesus isn't just a local Savior. He's a global Savior.

And that my friends, is the message that Jesus wants us to hear today. Look how he starts this section, "*Listen to me, you islands, hear this you distant nations.*" We're 7200 miles and 2000 years separated from Jesus, but he picked up the megaphone of Isaiah's pen because he wanted us to hear this conversation. By God's grace, Jesus wanted us to know that his salvation reaches us. And it has. By God's grace, God took Jesus as a polished arrow out of his quiver, and shot him our way, and he hit the bullseye of our hearts. By God's grace, God's rescue plan has reached you. That's no small thing. In fact, when it comes to our life, there's no bigger thing. Amen.



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We often make God too small. We shrink Jesus to what feels useful or familiar. But the Lord says, "It is too small a thing" for his Servant to save only a few. Jesus was sent for the world—and for you. Planned from eternity, armed with God's Word, and faithful even when rejected, Christ carried out God's rescue mission all the way to the cross. His light has reached even here. Open your eyes: your Savior is not small. He is exactly what you need.