

January 16, 2005

Epiphany 2

"Why Jesus Is Called a Highly Polished Arrow"

ISAIAH 49:1-6

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. 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 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." 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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

When we were kids we tried to make our own bows and arrows. The bow was a branch from a willow growing along the river. The string was a piece of cotton twine. The arrows were crudely split pieces of wood from a pine or cedar board. The arrows were not always straight. When you shot them from the bow, they would veer off in one direction or the other. Then one day my dad bought us a fiberglass bow with cedar arrows that were straight, brightly painted with feathers and sharp points. With straight arrows and a better bow we actually began to hit the target, even landing some arrows in the bull's eye.

In these words just read to you, Jesus the Messiah, the servant of the Lord, speaks about himself as a polished arrow in the hand of his heavenly Father.

Ancient people carefully crafted and polished their arrows so they would fly straight and hit the mark. When it comes to hitting the problem of sin and destroying it for you, your heavenly Father took over the job, sent his Son like a highly polished arrow. With precision and accuracy he hit the condemning results of your sin and destroyed the sin completely.

There are many different names in the Bible for Jesus, such as the Shepherd who dies for the sheep, the Vine and the branches, or the familiar name of Lamb of God. Names such as the Vine, or the Shepherd, or the Lamb of God are well known names. The name before us this morning of a highly polished arrow is buried away and hidden in this prophecy of Isaiah. Yet, this picture or name for Jesus is very comforting to us. This morning we want to take a closer look at these words just read to you as we learn **"Why Jesus Is Called a Highly Polished Arrow."**

1) He hits the mark of our salvation perfectly

Jesus is called a highly polished arrow concealed in the quiver because he alone can take aim at our problem of sin and destroy it. The Servant of the Lord, Jesus the Messiah, calls

to the distant lands to see how he was chosen for a task that no human being could ever accomplish. "Listen to me you islands hear this you distant nations. Before I was born, the Lord called me from birth, he had made mention of my name." Way back in eternity our heavenly Father had it in his mind to send his Son to take aim at our problem of sin, hit it perfectly and destroy the problem for us.

Jewish rabbis understand these verses about the Servant of the Lord to apply to the nation of Israel. They see Israel as the arrow in the hand of the Lord to be used for his glory and honor. They base this on the words in verse 3 that say, "He said to me, 'You are my servant Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'" If we read these verses carefully we discover that the Lord goes on to say that this Servant will restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. The Servant is a person not a nation. God used the nation of Israel for his splendor by having the Messiah born from the Jews. We call that place on earth, "The Holy Land" because that is where Jesus, the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world.

Now that we have established the highly polished arrow, the Servant of the Lord, is not Israel but Jesus, listen again to what the Messiah says. "Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name." The coming of the Messiah was carefully predicted in Genesis 3 where the Lord spoke to the devil and said a seed of the woman would crush his head. For centuries God's people sacrificed Lambs in the temple, and butchered the Passover Lamb with their families when they celebrated the Passover together. All of this carefully pictured in advance the blood of Jesus that would cleanse us from all sin. Jesus was a carefully polished arrow who would take careful aim at our sin and destroy it completely.

The Messiah Jesus also tells us in these words that his mouth was like a sharpened sword. "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me." The heavenly Father used Jesus to speak to the people of his generation and to the people of all times. When we read the gospel in our worship service, we stand out of respect for the words of Jesus. The words of Jesus are powerful like sword, because they can cut deeply into the heart. If I think that some how I have the ability to make myself acceptable to God by trying to love God and love other people, I only need to listen to the powerful words of Jesus that show me I need his help to be saved or rescued from me sin. It was Jesus who told us that we must love the Lord our God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves if we expect to make it on our own.

The words of Jesus expose my problem of sin. They cut deeply into my basic philosophy of life that thinks I can make it on my own. His words destroy my false beliefs. The words of Jesus are powerful like a sword, because they also are words that give life to me when I come to see how dead I am. John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus talked about himself as the Son of Man who had come to seek and save that which was lost. The words of Jesus are so powerful that they cut into our hearts. Then they bring healing and help. Jesus said, "My words are spirit and they are life."

As a sharpened sword and polished arrow in the hand of the heavenly Father, Jesus tells us how he will be used to bring glory and splendor to his heavenly Father. "He said to me, 'You are my servant Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'" We see God's splendor

in his creation. Look at the beautiful days he has given us after the rains, the green hills, the pictures of galaxies and even Saturn from outer space, the stars filling the heavens with his glory. We see an even greater display of glory in the way he rescues us and saves us by taking aim at our problem of sin.

During the storms last week, a man from San Luis Obispo was driving from through LA. His car spun into the median, spun around again, went down the embankment and into the rain swollen concrete lined river that flows through LA. People were able to pull his daughters to safety before the car started going down stream. Rescue teams threw out ropes with floatation devices as his car was being swept under the bridge and he was clinging to the roof. He grabbed on and they started pulling him up on the rope. Only no one was watching to see when his hands that were holding the rope came to the railing on the bridge. The force of his hands hitting the bridge caused him to let go. He fell down again, barely missing the concrete below and was finally rescued. People have died being rescued because those who rescue them may not always do the right thing to save someone.

When it comes to your problem of sin, your heavenly Father took careful aim at the problem. Jesus was the highly polished arrow concealed in the quiver of the heavenly Father. It was this special weapon that accomplished your salvation for you. Isaiah 53 says, "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." That same chapter says, "It was the Lord's will to crush him." I am holding in my hand a level that has a laser on it. It makes a perfectly straight line. When it came to hitting the mark of sin, our Father pulled the highly polished arrow, took aim at a certain moment and time in history and destroyed sin for us, something we could never do on our own.

Does everyone appreciate this perfect aim that Jesus took at our problem of sin? No, many feel comfortable trying to make their own way with God that ultimately will lead them to perish forever. Notice what the Messiah says, "I have labored to no purpose, I have spent my strength for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God." Among his own people the Messiah would be rejected. The people of his own hometown of Nazareth wanted to kill him for claiming he was more than a carpenter's son, that he was Lord and God from all eternity. Many nights Jesus would retreat into the hills to pray to his heavenly Father for strength. He died praying, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." The highly polished arrow, rejected by people, placed his life in the hands of his heavenly Father who raised him to life again.

It is only by God's grace that you believe Jesus took perfect aim and your problem of sin. You were born wanting nothing to do with God's plan. You were born thinking you could carve and shape and polish your own arrows and shoot at the problem of sin and destroy it. Then your eyes were opened to see how far you fall short of God's glory and that your only hope is plan that God has for you. In the Revelation John hears people singing and shouting around the throne of the Lamb, "Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb."

2) He extends salvation to all nations

Is this highly polished arrow that aims at the problem of sin only for a certain group of people? No it was not just for the Jewish people. It is for all nations. Listen to what the

Father says to his Son, the Messiah. "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to distant lands." The Messiah began speaking in this section by saying, "Listen to you islands, you distant nations." The actual Hebrew for distant nations has the thought of people living along the coasts. Think of how many people live in the coastal regions of the world. Some of the people living in these coastal regions perished in the recent tsunami. People love living on the coasts so they could carry on commerce, share things with each other by ships. The largest population centers in our country are coastal cities. The heavenly Father wants this highly polished arrow of his salvation to reach people in every part of the world including the heavily populated coastal regions of the world.

What the Father spoke to his Son he also speaks to us here this morning. "I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." How many people aren't there still left in the world who are making their own little crooked arrows to solve their problem of sin? How many don't know what you know this morning about Jesus being this highly polished arrow? That's why we are still left here and why we have another week to serve the Lord. With John the Baptist we can proclaim, "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Amen.