

January 16, 2011  
Epiphany 2

*"Jesus, a Polished Arrow in the Hand of His Father"*

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**ISAIAH 49:1-6**

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*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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor." <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> 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-- <sup>6</sup> 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."*

The Old Testament book of Isaiah has been called the Fifth Gospel. You know the four gospels that speak about the life of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Old Testament book of Isaiah is called the Fifth Gospel because it tells us so much about Jesus 700 years before he comes into the world. On Christmas morning we celebrated Jesus' birth by preaching from Isaiah 9:6. We heard of a child born to us with the amazing names of Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The chapter of the Bible that most intensely describes the suffering Jesus went through for our sin is found in Isaiah 53 with its familiar words, "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The punishment for our peace was upon him."

In these words just read to you from Isaiah, Jesus is called the Servant of the Lord." At first glance we may think these words about a servant are referring to the nation of Israel because it says, "You are my servant Israel in whom I will display my splendor." But then it says this Servant will restore the tribes of Jacob and be a light for the Gentiles. You realize this is speaking to us about Jesus. We love the names the Bible gives for Jesus such as Lamb of God, Shepherd, the Light of the World, Redeemer, Savior, King of kings and Lord of lords. Here in these words Jesus is called a "polished arrow" in the hand of his heavenly Father.

To appreciate how Jesus is a polished arrow in the hand of our heavenly Father, I am holding in my hand an arrow that is smooth and polished, with feathers and a metal point. In ancient times people would spend hours trying to get their arrows smooth and straight so they could hit their enemies or kill animals for food. When we were children we made our own bows out of willow branches. We tried to make arrows out of cedar wood which we split and then made smooth. We even attached chicken feathers to help the arrow fly straight. Needless to say, the arrows we made did not fly very straight. We were lucky to hit a tree from ten feet away. But then my dad bought us a fiberglass bow, with straight arrows. Suddenly we were hitting targets from 20 and thirty feet away.

We ask for the Holy Spirit's blessing on our words and meditation as we think of our Jesus as a polished arrow in the hand of our heavenly Father. This picture of the arrow helps us appreciate even more what a good job he does of saving us and rescuing us.

## **He hits the mark of our salvation perfectly**

All religions of the world tell us that we must do something to hit the mark of saving ourselves. Only in the Christian faith do you have your God doing everything perfectly to save you. It should not surprise us then that Jesus calls out to the distant nations to look to him as the source and hope of being rescued from the problem of sin that infects us all. "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." Way back into eternity our heavenly Father planned for Jesus to come into this world to rescue us.

In Genesis the Lord God predicted a Savior who would crush the devil's head, but in the process his heel would be bruised. The Hebrew people knew the Lord had planned a Yishua, a Deliverer, a Messiah, who would be so powerful that he could save the people from their sins.

Jesus tells us that his mouth would be like a sharpened sword. "He made my mouth like sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me." The words of Jesus cut deeply into the hearts of people. He exposed their problem of sin and warned of the judgment to come. He pleaded with people to come to him and put their trust in him for salvation instead of themselves. We never grow tired of hearing and reading the words of Jesus because they change our lives. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." When we get weary and worn from all the problems of this life then Jesus' words lift us up as he tells us in John 14, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going to prepare a place for you...I will come back and take you to be with me..." The words of Jesus cut into our hearts and lead us to confess our sin before him. We hear John the Baptist telling us this morning, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Think of all the times the words of Jesus have been used in your life to change you and bring you close to him.

Now let's spend some time thinking about this name for Jesus, this name given here, this name about a polished arrow in the hand of our heavenly Father. "He made me a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver." Think again of how much work ancient people put into making arrows that were straight, attaching feathers, and attaching pieces of sharp flint as points on the arrow. The English were successful with their long bows because they had access to a good source of arrows that flew straight and true. How poor we were as children at even hitting a tree, because did not have arrows that flew straight.

Every person born into this world believes with all their heart they can make their own arrows to take aim at their problem of sin and make it go away. Remember the man who came to Jesus at night. His name was Nicodemus. He believed in his heart of hearts that he could make the right arrows to take aim at his problem of sin and make it go away. He wanted to save himself by meticulously following Old Testament laws and extra laws set down by the rabbis. Jesus then told him he needed to be born again to be saved. At first Nicodemus laughed at this do. But then he heard Jesus say so simply and so clearly, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." Then Jesus went on to say, "God so loved the world..." Instead of making our own arrows that never hit the mark, Jesus is telling us this morning, he is the polished arrow that can hit the mark perfectly and save us completely.

How good was Jesus at taking aim and destroying your problem of sin? Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." The prophet Isaiah says "the punishment that brought us peace was upon

him." His payment for our sin was perfect. When he cried from the cross, "It is finished" he was announcing to the whole world that he was the polished arrow in the hands of the Father. He hit the mark perfectly.

It was about the time that my dad gave us a bow and arrows that I saw my first Robin Hood movie on black and white television. Remember that scene where there is an archery contest. It appears Robin Hood is about to lose the match when on the sheriff's top archer lands the arrow in the middle of the target. Then Robin Hood shot an arrow that also went into the center of the target and split the other arrow. At that time we were taking archery classes, and I knew that no one could ever do that. It was impossible. A perfect and holy God expects every human being to hit the mark perfectly to be saved. In Romans 3 the Lord defines sin as falling short of the mark, God's mark of perfection. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." But then Jesus hit the mark perfectly. His payment for sin was perfect. He lived a perfect life that is now credited to your account. The Father raised Jesus from the dead to prove to you the polished arrow in his hand did the job perfectly for you.

### **He wants salvation for all people**

How will people respond to this amazing good news that Jesus has done it all to rescue us? Listen to what the Messiah tells us, "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." Jesus suffered when people turned up their noses at what he had to offer them. They did not want to give up their hope of shooting their crooked arrows to make themselves acceptable to God. They did not want Jesus to do the job for them. The great gospel chapter of Isaiah 53 begins with these words "Who believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed." Jesus often spent the night in prayer to his dear heavenly Father, because he was exhausted from all the people who rejected him. He put his life and his difficult days into the hands of the heavenly Father.

What happens when some people reject Jesus as the only polished arrow who came save them? The Lord takes this message to other people so they have an opportunity to listen and believe. The Lord 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." Isaiah is rightly called the Fifth Gospel, because it not only speaks clearly of Jesus the one to save us, it also lets us know that God in his mercy will reach people in all the world with this message of how Jesus has rescued us. Even as I speak, there are people who are laying down their crooked arrows and crooked ideas about saving themselves by their false religions. They are coming to Jesus from distant lands. I recently heard how people in China with ample access to smart phones are able to download the Bible read in their own language. I read this past week how Christians who are being persecuted by the government of Iran are gathering in secret groups to read the Bible. They are giving up their crooked and twisted ideas of saving themselves. They are seeing Jesus as this perfect Savior, this polished arrow in the hand of our heavenly Father.

Look at the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Look at the polished arrow in the hand of your heavenly Father. Amen.