Lunchtime Service - Isaiah 49:1-6

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[0:00] There's something particularly tragic about lost potential, isn't there? Something tragic about the story of a life that could have been,! A story of a life that should have been.

There was a basketball player in the NBA called Derrick Rose, and he was incredible. If you've ever seen Derrick Rose play, he's one of the best players I've ever seen. He's the most explosive guy that you'll ever see.
And he was the youngest player, in fact, to ever win the MVP, most valuable player award in the NBA. He's still the youngest ever to hold that. Best player in the league. And he won that in 2011.
And so he was at the start of his career, and you could just see how good this guy's going to be. Maybe one of the best ever. And he was unreal. That was 2011. And then a year later, one game, he landed badly, tore his ACL, lost all of his explosiveness, and he just never played the same again.
And it's painful, it's tragic to think of what could have been. Or think of that really promising guy in your year at school, good GCSEs, but got into drugs, got into the wrong crowds, and just all that potential was lost.
[1:15] And you just think what could have been, what should have been in that life. Or we can think closer to home. We can look at our own lives, our families, where we've ended up, and all the mistakes we've made, all those choices, and it can be painful to think what could have been, and what should have been with our lives.

Well, here in Isaiah, that's the story of Israel, God's people. They were meant for something great, called to be God's holy people, a reflection of God's holiness here on earth.
They were meant to be a kingdom of priests, the place that you can come to know God. God's blessed people, glorifying God here on earth.
But now, here in Isaiah, they are a disaster. Sin, idolatry, wandering very far from God, just in utter ruin.
The greater the height, the harder they fall. And you can't help but think, what could have been, what should have been? Well, this servant song in Isaiah, it appears right in the midst of that ruin.
[2:29] And this is God promising to restore what should have been. We're in a series looking at these four servant songs in Isaiah, which are basically four prophecies about this figure called God's servant who's going to come and bring salvation.

And so these are basically four pictures of Jesus painted centuries before he's born. And these servant songs, they kind of just pop up out of nowhere in Isaiah, just out of the ruin of Israel, out of this story of what could have been.
And we just suddenly hear of this coming saviour. And so if you're kind of trying to get into these servant songs and you're wondering, what is this?
Why is this here in Isaiah? What's this doing? Well, even if you were to read Isaiah from start to finish, you would still think that. The servant is just a bit of a surprise.
He just appears. But that surprise is God's grace. It is his surprising promise to restore what should have been.
[3:42] And we're going to see today that promise, it's not just for Israel. God is promising this for the whole world. And so if you're here today looking at your life, thinking what could have been, what should have been, well, God is offering you hope here.

He is promising to restore the ruins. But we do need to begin with Israel here. The servant's work, Jesus' work, it begins with Israel.
And this is the first thing I want us to see. Jesus has come to restore Israel. So in chapter 42, that we saw the first servant song, we heard God speaking about the servant.

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But now in this servant song, the servant is speaking to us. And so I want us to hear all of this as Jesus speaking. And look how he begins.
He calls the world to attention. Verse one, listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The coastlands, as far as you can walk, and every nation and tribe from afar, the whole world, wake up and listen.
[4:53] Jesus is saying, you need to hear this. And what is he telling us? All about God's plan for Jesus. The Lord called me from the womb.

Jesus was not a man on his own mission. Jesus didn't just come up with his teaching. He didn't just kind of suddenly think about to do this journey to the cross.
No one here on earth gave Jesus meaning or made him special. Sometimes people might say, oh, well, I don't believe in Jesus, but it's nice that he means something to you.
Almost as if we give him meaning that he wouldn't otherwise have. But that's not who Jesus is. We don't give Jesus meaning.
We don't define him. No, Jesus' life from the womb is defined by God. And his whole life is shaped by God. He made my mouth like a sharp sword.
[6:00] This is speaking of his words here. Jesus' words have power like a sword. When he speaks, it's the power of God to cut and divide hearts.

The power to slay enemies and to bring victory in this world. Jesus' mission here, here on earth, it's all to do with words.
That's why we preach the gospel. That's why we are a Bible-centered, gospel-preaching church.
Jesus is conquering this world not using a steel sword, but by the sword of his mouth.
And so Jesus is far more than just a good teacher or a man with wise sayings or good principles. No. His words are God-given.
When you hear Jesus speak, you are hearing the sharp voice of God. And not only that, his life is protected by God.
[7:04] In the shadow of his hand, he hid me. Jesus from the womb, in all that he did on earth, he was a servant called by God, equipped by God, protected by God.

And all this was for a task. He came on a God-given mission. And what is it? Verse five. 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. This is a picture of the shepherd bringing wandering sheep back. Jesus was called and equipped to bring a wandering Israel back and gather the true people of God.
And you see that in the Gospels, don't you? He calls his disciples. He calls the Jewish crowds. He calls Jerusalem.
And people begin to follow him. They take up their cross and follow him. As they believe in the son, that is Jesus, the servant, bringing Jacob back to himself.
[8:18] When those 3,000 souls were added to the church of Pentecost, that was Jesus gathering Israel back to God. Not that all Israel listened, but those who were his, he gathered.

But it's interesting. Did you notice what this servant is called? Verse three. And God said to me, you are my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified.
The servant is called to gather Israel, but at the same time, this servant is called Israel. Why is that? Well, there is a difference with Jesus.
Because while the nation of Israel became a disappointment and a fractured ruin, look what God says about Jesus. You are Israel, in whom I will be glorified.
God was not glorified in the nation of Israel. They were not what they could have been. They were not what they should have been. But Jesus is different.
[9:33] Jesus came to be everything that Israel should have been. In Jesus, God's holiness and perfection is displayed in all its fullness and beauty.

His obedience to God, never wavering. Every thought of his heart always set on the Lord. Just a glorious display of the grace and mercy of God.
He is in every way what Israel should have been. This is why he's called the true Israel. The true vine, as Reuben preached a few weeks ago.
He's the perfect fulfillment of what Israel should have been. And so we need to realize you will never be disappointed by Jesus. His life is never a story of wasted potential.

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And so if you're here today and you're still figuring out who Jesus is, let me assure you, the more you look into him, the more you realize he is everything that you hope him to be. And his obedience was so great, it led him to a cross.
[10:48] And in his obedience and love for God, he bore the sins of his people for all the things that they should have been but weren't. He bore that disappointment, that failure, that wandering.

He became a ruin on that cross so that his people would be restored. And so in that great moment of weakness, on that cross, it had the appearance that the servant had failed.
Look at verse 4. But I said, I have labored in vain, I've spent my strength for nothing in vanity. On the cross, it seemed like all had failed.
It seemed like another what could have been story. But actually, Jesus knew this is how God restores the broken. Yet surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God.
Jesus' trust in God, it was unwavering. And it was through that death that was how Jacob was gathered back. That is how a life marred with what should have been gets gathered back to God and restored.
[12:03] And what is even more remarkable is that from the very beginning, God planned this restoration for Israel, but he also planned this restoration for the whole world.

And this is the second and final thing I want us to see. Jesus came to be a light to the world. Listen to these amazing words. Verse 6. God 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. Now when it says, do you see, too light?
It doesn't mean restoring Israel isn't important. No. It is, that is a huge glorious task. But what God is saying is that Jesus is worth so much.
His obedience is so great. His cross is so powerful. Only restoring Israel. It's small fry work for him.
[13:19] So think of a bodybuilder in a gym and he goes up to, you know, the big rack of dumbbells that go from light to heavy and you tell him, okay, go to one side, go pick up the one kilogram, the little one there and he goes up to it and he can and he will.

He does it without failure, nice and easy. But you know as he does that, that athlete is designed for so much more. That one kilogram is too light a thing.
You want to say to him, no, you can go further, go to the end of the rack, pick all that up. Well, only bringing back the preserved of Israel, that that's too light a thing.
The servant's grace is far greater and his work goes well beyond Israel. God has made this servant a light for all the nations of the world and he has come so that his salvation will reach to the end of the earth.
It is for us and so while Israel is a story of a life that should have been, in reality, that that's the story of the whole world, isn't it?
[14:36] And I'm sure we are all painfully aware that that is the story of each of our lives. we have all come here today not as what we should be. As sinners, as ruined images of God, we are not what we should be.

And so, we have the reality of looking back at our lives and seeing all those sins, all those failures, all the ways in which we went down the wrong path and made our lives not what they could be or should be.
the ruin is not just Israel, it's all of us. And it is a darkness. The nations, we sit in darkness.
Well, the servant has come, the Lord Jesus has come as a light for the nations to shine into the darkness and disappointment of our lives and bring restoration and healing and to bring your life back to what it should be.
And all that begins with forgiveness. Trusting in the Lord Jesus and him taking all your failures, not having you burdened by them, but taking all those failures, all that wandering, nailing it to the cross and bringing complete forgiveness.
[16:00] us. And for those in Christ, that is what has happened to us. This servant, our saviour, has gathered us back to God and that forgiveness will never be taken away from you.

But even more, Jesus continues to restore us. That's what sanctification is. That is what the Spirit is doing in your life every day, taking the ruins of what could have been and making us more into what we should be.

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Now, not perfect this side of heaven, but all that God is working in you, that hope, that faith, that love, upholding you every day, that is the light for the nations shining in your life.
And how is he doing this? Well, it's by his word. The sharp sword of his mouth and that is why preaching, it's never a waste of time.
Never think your problems are too big and God's word just won't cut it. No, it is too light a thing that Jesus only restores Israel. No, he has come to restore you.
[17:17] And so, if you are here today and you are plagued by disappointment and regret, that pain of what life could have been and should have been, well, there is hope.

There is a light and it is this servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, he has come to restore and so put your trust in him and he will never disappoint because praise the Lord, he is everything we should be and he's everything we're not.
And so, listen up, coastlands, give attention, you peoples from afar. This is who the Lord Jesus is. I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.
Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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