

October 25, 2015

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 53:10-12

The Servant's Humble Obedience to the LORD's Will

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Dearly loved by God in Christ, who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many:

The Ethiopian official asked Philip this question about the words in Isaiah 53:7,8 he had been reading while sitting in his chariot: "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" [Acts 8:34] Can you recall Philip's response? "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." [35]

Our first lesson is Isaiah 53:10-12. I will begin with that very passage of Scripture to tell you the good news about Jesus, the suffering Servant Isaiah wrote about. These particular verses point to **The Servant's Humble Obedience to the LORD's Will**. By that humble obedience, 1) Jesus secured life for sinners. 2) Jesus is the heart of the message that justifies sinners. 3) Jesus makes sinners the LORD's eternal possession.

Isaiah 53 is the prophet's great portrait in five sections of the suffering Servant who would redeem all us sinners. Philip was not alone in identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. We read Jesus' words in St. Luke's gospel, "I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment." [22:37]

God the Father's will brought about all Jesus endured as our Substitute. The Father crushed Jesus. The Father caused Jesus to suffer. The Father demanded Jesus' life as compensation for our lives in his offering for our sin. Jesus' humble obedience, the servant's humble obedience to the LORD's will, is what secured life for us sinners.

God the Father rewarded his Son for his humble obedience. Though he died, Jesus rose from the dead to see his offspring; we and all believers are those offspring. Though Jesus died, the Father gave him life and prolonged his days through all eternity in Jesus' exaltation.

On account of Christ's humble obedience, God has given us his new birth, though we were dead in our trespasses and sins, through the Word of Christ in the means of grace. God the Father has prolonged our days with Jesus' life so that when we close our eyes in death here on earth, we will continue to live forever with Jesus in Paradise.

Isaiah wrote of the suffering Servant, "the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand." Jesus did not fail. Jesus did not disappoint his Father or leave us still in death. Humble obedience succeeded in Jesus' hand. Jesus secured life for sinners. Jesus secured life for us.

Isaiah went on to define in greater detail the benefit of the suffering Servant's obedience. In verse 11, the prophet wrote that the Servant "will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities."

Because of the struggle not only in his body but also in his soul, the suffering Servant would see the good results. The Father would refresh his Son with the knowledge his suffering had not been for nothing. The Son's obedience even to death on the cross paid for all sins. His resurrection declares the many, all sinners, not guilty of our sins.

Jesus is the heart of the message that justifies sinners. Jesus is my suffering servant, my Savior. He bore my iniquities. By Jesus' faithful service in that office he has acquired salvation, justification, for many, for the entire world. Even though my personal state of righteousness remains unchanged, corrupt and a stench in God's nostrils, leading to ungodliness and

damnation, God has pronounced me righteous in his eyes. Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for us.

Jesus had the knowledge necessary to do that work. God gave him the spirit of wisdom and of understanding. Jesus had the fear of the Lord. Jesus had the knowledge of God's saving plan and the knowledge how to complete it. With that same perfect knowledge, Jesus gave spiritual riches to the poor in spirit, rest to the weary, and salvation to the Gentiles. In his new exalted life at the Father's right hand, Jesus continues to intercede for us as a priest forever, from eternity to eternity, after the order of Melchizedek.

We might echo the Ethiopian's question, "Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Like him, now we know. Like the Ethiopian, and Philip for that matter, you and I are the LORD's eternal possession because of the servant's humble obedience to God's will.

In the final verse of Isaiah's great poetic portrait of God's suffering Servant, the prophet points again to Jesus Christ. Isaiah points to the Servant's glorious superhuman exaltation and reward. God the Father gives Jesus as his portion the great number of believers who follow him. "Great" and "strong" in English mean "many" and "numerous." We are the spoils of Christ's victory. He shares with us the spiritual gifts of his grace as members of his church. We are both his reward and the fruits he bears as our Savior.

All of this comes about because "he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

As I mentioned, Jesus applied Isaiah 53 to himself. The entire New Testament testifies that Isaiah's words apply to Jesus Christ. Jesus is step by step and line by line the fulfillment of the suffering Servant whom God exalted as a reward for completing his work of redeeming the entire world. Jesus is the Son of Man who taught his disciples what real greatness and genuine service is all about as we heard in our gospel lesson. We want to apply Jesus' lesson there in our lives as his disciples. Right?

No cleverness, no supposed insight will ever succeed in applying Isaiah's words to anyone but Jesus Christ, our Savior. Faith stands before Isaiah's portrayal of the Lord and prays with the hymn writer, Paul Gerhardt:

Lord, be my consolation,
My shield when I must die;
Remind me of your passion
When my last hour draws nigh.
My eyes will then behold you,
Upon your cross will dwell;
My heart will then enfold you-
Who dies in faith dies well. CW 105 s. 7
Amen. <SDG>