

Isaiah 49:1-7 - Who Takes Away the Sin of the World?

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When I started to work on today's sermon, I was struck by how clear all three of our readings for today are when it comes to emphasizing that, as God says through St. Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9, "*By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" As you may know, this is one of the soap boxes I tend to get on with it comes to our salvation because I get so frustrated not so much by the non-Christian religions which teach that we can be saved by what we do, but by so many Christian denominations which also lead people in blatant and subtle ways to believe that we have something to do with our salvation.

It's also sad, but not surprising, to see the large number of people who support such teaching because it goes along with what their sinful nature (that we're all born with) already believes—that we can save ourselves. For even if it's the teaching of most new evangelical churches that we choose to follow Jesus, such false teaching leads people to put their faith partly in themselves for their salvation instead of God. And that's always a demonic direction because such false teaching works to cause us to doubt in our salvation due to the imperfections of all that we do.

What does God the Father tell us through His Word and the His chosen Servant and Son, Jesus Christ? At the end of our OT reading, the second Suffering Servant Song in the book of Isaiah, God the Father and His Servant tell us that it is "*the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.*" The Suffering Servant in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ backed up these words when He said, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you*" (John 15:16).

Through such words almighty God assures us that our even our faith in Jesus Christ is a gift of God. And since God's gifts for our salvation are perfect, we can rest secure in the fact that not only is Jesus' payment for our sins through His death all sufficient, but so also is our faith since they are both gifts of God. Therefore, when our sinful nature causes us to doubt in our salvation because of it's sinful imperfections, our God given faith takes us over and over again to His sure word and promises.

So, "*who takes away the sin of the world,*" along with all our worries, fears, and frustrations? God answer that question in our Gospel reading: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" That's not a question but a statement of fact. Thanks be to God!

That's why, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. Paul told the Christians in Corinth, "*I give thanks to my God for you because of the **grace** of God that was **given** you in Christ Jesus...who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Do these words lead us to believe that we had anything to do with our salvation? No. They give all thanks and glory to God who gives and sustains our saving faith. So why get so frustrated, I say to myself. Just keep on telling people the truth and don't worry or get frustrated with the numbers; with how many will or will not believe in Jesus alone as their Savior. Worry is a tool of the devil which focuses our attention on our abilities instead of God's promises, and works to keep us from doing what God calls us to do.

The first part of our OT reading talks about these same things. And even though it's the second of God's Suffering Servant Songs in Isaiah, which point to Jesus Christ, as members of His body through the gift of faith, we can also apply these words to ourselves.

"*Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you people from afar.*" These words emphasize that God's Word is meant to be heard by all nations—all people.

“The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother He named my name.” Here again, God emphasizes His work not only in the miraculous conception of His Son in the womb of the virgin Mary, but also His miraculous conception of our new life in the womb of the Church through His Holy Word and Baptism.

“He made my mouth like a sharp sword.” This speaks of the main weapon that Christ and His church uses in the fight against evil. It’s the mouth when we proclaim God’s word of truth. God promises, *“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it”* (Isaiah 55:11). God works through these words of truth, even when they are spoken from our mouths, to focus our attention not on ourselves but on Him and His power to accomplish His work of salvation through the message of the Gospel—the *“sharp”* or *“two-edged sword”* (Hebrews 4:12) that has the power to deal with our deep seated sinful nature in a way that kills it without killing us.

But then, in verse four of our text, the suffering servant, who would be Jesus Christ, said: *“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.”* It certainly seems that way, doesn’t it? At times we can share God’s Word with someone until we’re blue in the face, and still they continue to act as if it has fallen on deaf ears. Jesus shared His Word with others not only until He was blue in the face, but crucified, dead and buried. And, for people like Judas, Jesus did *“[labor] in vain.”* Even though He suffered and died on the cross for Judas’ sins, Judas rejected Jesus as his Savior, as many still do today.

But the suffering servant continued by saying: *“yet surely my right is with the Lord.”* The word translated *“right”* could also be translated, *“justice,”* *“Yet surely my justice is with the Lord.”* These words bring to mind God’s justice in the first Suffering Servant Song, where we were told last week that the Suffering Servant *“will not grow faint or be discouraged until He has established justice in the earth.”* This justice of God’s Law was fulfilled not only when Jesus kept God’s Law perfectly, but also when He suffered the just punishment for our sins in our place. You and I can now keep God’s Law when we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, which, again, is the work of God through His gift of faith.

It’s this Good News that God works through to make us, like John the Baptist and especially Jesus, willing to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to point to Jesus as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* Will we be labeled as foolish by some, and deeply despised by others, as John and Jesus were when they proclaimed this Good News? Jesus assured us that we will (Matthew 10:16-33).

Yet, we say with Jesus, *“my recompense is with my God.”* This speaks of the recompense or reward of eternal life in paradise with God, that Jesus earned for us and gave us through the Gospel. Therefore, with this assurance from God, we continue to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to point others to Jesus as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* All glory be to [pause] God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

[Children’s Sermon] What did I say is the main weapon God uses to cut people free from their sins and death? Was it a sword or knife like this one? No. It’s our mouth which is like a sharp sword when we tell people not only that they are sinners who deserve to die, but also that Jesus is their Savior who died on the cross to pay for our sins so that we can live forever with Him.

When we tell people this message from God some will say we’re stupid, and some will even want to kill us, like they killed Jesus. But some will believe us. We don’t know who will believe in Jesus as their Savior, or who will not believe, so we tell everyone. And even if they kill us, like they killed Jesus, Jesus tells us not to worry because He will raise us up just like Him so that we can live forever with Him and the whole family of God in paradise.

Here’s a graham cracker with a chocolate cross on it to remind you that when you read God’s Word in the Bible, which tells us about how Jesus saves us, Jesus goes into our bodies like this graham cracker when we eat it, and makes us want to tell others about all the good things God gives us, especially Jesus as our Savior!