

“God’s Anointed Servant” + Isaiah 42:1-9
The Baptism of Our Lord + January 15, 2023

Dear Friends in Christ,

“You can’t get any good service these days.” “No one wants to work.” “You can’t get any good help.” But the Lord says in the text: “Behold my servant” (v.1). God has Someone on this earth doing His work and He wants us to pay attention to Him. “Behold!” Some have supposed that the servant of the Lord is the nation of Israel itself. We know that sometimes Israel was referred to as the servant of the Lord. So also were Abraham (Genesis 26:24), Jacob (Ezekiel 28:25), Moses (Joshua 1:1,2,7), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), Job (Job 1:8, 2:3), David (2 Samuel 3:18), and others. But the servant that is described here does more than Israel or any other servant of the Lord could ever do. We don’t have to wonder who this servant is. The New Testament quotes this section at length and plainly identifies this Servant of the Lord as the Lord Jesus Himself. Christ’s fulfillment is just as verse 9 declares: “Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.” God’s rescue of His people that Isaiah described came to pass, and the coming of God’s Servant herein described also came to pass in the fullness of time. What else can be said about this servant?

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He does the work of God the Father. The Lord says that His Servant is one “whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him” (v.1). God the Father has His hand on this Servant of His to uphold and strengthen Him to complete all the work that the Father has in store for Him. He is the chosen one, the one nearest and dearest to the Father’s heart. Elsewhere this Servant is called God’s only-begotten Son. From the bottom of His heart God the Father finds delight in this His beloved Servant.

We find this in the reading from Matthew 3 today. When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River we read “Behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:17). When Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized, John himself wondered if it was the right thing to do. He told Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (v.14). Here came the tax collectors and prostitutes and notorious sinners of all types. What was Jesus, the spotless Son of the Father, doing in a lineup like that? He was identifying Himself with sinners. He was

doing exactly what He had been sent to do: to be numbered with the transgressors, to be the sin-bearer for all the human race. And the Father looked down from heaven and said “I am well pleased.” This is the same delight the Father showed at the end of Christ’s work when He raised Him from the dead. Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

Isaiah also says this about God’s servant: “I have put my Spirit upon Him” (v.1). This, also, we see coming to fulfillment at the Jordan River: “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him” (Matthew 3:16). As the eternal Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, Jesus did not need the Holy Spirit. The Son of God was one essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit from before time began. But as a genuine human being, Christ benefitted greatly from this anointing, this giving of the Spirit. Christ, according to His human nature, was like Aaron the first high priest or David the king or Elisha the prophet. They all benefitted from the gifts of the Holy Spirit poured out upon them when they were anointed into their office. Christ is the Prophet, the Priest, and the King all rolled into one. He was anointed, not with mere olive oil, but with the Holy Spirit directly.

And so Jesus conducts His ministry in perfect alignment with the will of the Father Himself. How often Jesus spoke of His work as being the work of the Father. How often He identified His words as the word from the Father Himself. He serves in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Just what is this Servant of the Lord to do? Well, God the Father does not need His work. God the Father is perfect and complete and lacks nothing. But this Servant of the Lord is sent to serve us! What will He do? Three times it is said that His work is all about bringing “justice” to the world. “He will bring forth justice to the nations” (v. 1). “He will faithfully bring forth justice” (v.3). “He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law” (v.4). This justice or judgment that the great Servant of the Lord brings is not the justice that an earthly ruler will bring. Earthly rulers conquer with might and use force. They launch an attack or make arrests or levy fines and use the force of punishment to make

their enemies pay. To them, that is justice. But for the Servant of the Lord, this justice is established when the coastlands wait for, that is, rely on, His law [instruction].

This justice is different. It is a gift to the world brought in lowliness, quietness, and gentleness. When Matthew writes of this prophecy being fulfilled he says, “And many followed him [Jesus], and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope’” (Matthew 12:15b-21). How often we read in the Gospels that Jesus told people to keep quiet about healings He had performed (Matthew 12:16). This fulfills the word of the prophet here, that “He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street” (v.2). Jesus was not trying to start a riot or raise an army. He was not out to gather earthly followers. He was not trying to set Himself as a force against the Romans or any other earthly authority. His kingdom is not of this world. His justice and judgment are of a spiritual nature. “The coastlands wait for his law [instruction]” (v.4). It is a justice brought forth by people listening to the word of the Lord and believing in Him as the One who suffered justice in our place. In the famous Good Friday chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah 53, it describes further the work of this Servant of the Lord. “By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11). To come to know Him in a faith relationship results in us being accounted righteous, because He has carried our guilt. As Jesus comes to the Jordan River, according to a decree from the Father that will lead to the punishment of sin, all sins of all people are placed on Jesus.

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In Jesus, the work of the Creator God is restored. The Prophet identifies the Speaker as the Creator: “Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it” (v.5). God is the Maker of the heavens and the earth. He is the God who put

the breath of life into Adam and Eve and He Himself gives the breath of life into each living human today. What does this Creator say to His Servant? “I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (vv.6-7). When God finished making everything, it was all very good. But the Fall into sin was a horrible catastrophe that plunged God’s beautiful creation into darkness. It has put people into dungeons and prisons. Sin has brought such gloom and doom unto the earth that it is as though we are locked up deep beneath the earth where the light of day cannot get to us. To rectify this, the God the Father says to His Son Jesus, “I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you” (v.6). Thus it is the strength and power of the Father Himself, through the Holy Spirit who came upon Jesus, that will enable Christ to accomplish this mission. He will free the prisoners and bring light to those in darkness.

There is the prison of worthlessness. For example, a person grows up being taught that they are nobody. Their parents or other significant people tell them again and again that they are worth nothing. In adulthood they believe that. Jesus releases them from this prison by assuring them in the Gospel again and again that they are His redeemed children. “You are mine. I have paid the price of my precious blood to set you free. Here, I have a place for you at my side in eternity.”

There is the prison of bitterness. People have lost their faith because trouble and tragedy piled on a tangled mess of disappointment and sorrow in their lives. They expected that their lives would be easier if they trusted in the Jesus, the Lord’s Servant. From their dark pit they look up and wonder how there could even be a loving God. Jesus, through the instruction of His word, shines His light in their dark place. He shows them His own sorrow as He suffered on the cross. He helps them to see that, though they may never understand why God has allowed such sadness into their lives, they will also never understand why God should love them so much as to give up His Son in their place on the cross. In His suffering and sorrow they see the light of the love of God shining on them.

There is the prison of an unforgiving heart. People have been hurt by others—often by someone close to them, like a family member or neighbor—and they cannot let go of it. They literally make themselves sick by a toxic stew of anger and downright hatred that simmers in their hearts. The grudge may literally be killing them! The Lord Jesus opens up the door to that prison. He shows them that the way out of their misery is the very forgiveness that He has given to them. It is a soothing medicine that heals their bitterness toward others. They may not be able to forget what has been done to them, but with renewed faith in the Lord Jesus, the One who has forgiven them, they can pray for a forgiving heart. They can begin to make a decision not to rehearse the deed in their mind but rather to do good to the one who has offended them. In answer to their daily prayer for a forgiving heart, they will over time begin to feel the healing in their heart.

There is the fear of death. As one person with a horrible diagnosis said, “I do not fear dying—I know that when I die I will go home to be with Jesus. What I fear is what will happen to me between now and when I die.” Look at how we have been set free from the fear of death. That horrible, dark monster has now lost its sting. It is but the gateway into the eternal presence of our Lord, who dwells in unapproachable light. That same Christ, the light for the nations, will be there for such a person through every dark and shadowy day until the end of his or her earthly walk. Christ is a covenant for the people, a light for the nations. The Holy Spirit is present to give them faith. The light is turned on. They are shown the way out of their dark gloom.

I wish you all could come with me into the correctional center to see how some of these men live in the light of Christ even while they are incarcerated. Our numbers are very small. But some of these men who come display a wonderful hope and peace and joy in their Savior—sometimes more so than those of us who are on the outside. Even while they are incarcerated, they live and walk in the freedom of Christ their Savior.

**God be praised for His faithful Servant—our faithful Servant—Jesus!
Amen.**