**Behold My Servant**

**Isaiah 42:1-7**

Baptism of our Lord

01.08.2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is a servant? Someone who serves another, who does the will of one who is over them. A servant does not make choices in their work, but does ***ONLY*** what they are instructed to do. In our culture today, we may hear that word used to describe those who are paid to take care of the household needs of another. Those whom we elect to public office are called public servants, although their attitude and approach to governing does not seem much like servitude. Too many in such offices act as if they are the ruling class rather than those who are to be guided by the will of those they are serving, that is, the people.

Today’s definitions of servant does not really do justice to the word as it was understood at the time of Isaiah’s writing. Until we understand the intent and meaning of the word to the original audience, we cannot fully comprehend what God is saying in our text. Some phrases or words in Scripture have lost some of their originally intended force in our modern world; this is one of them.

A servant, as meant in our text, is someone who does not make any choices about anything, even in their own private life. They are completely given over to the one whom they serve. It sounds to our ears like slavery – that’s a dirty word today. And yet, that better fits God’s meaning of the word. A servant does solely the will of the one who has either purchased them or obtained them for service in some other manner.

Understanding that a servant makes no decisions nor does anything by their own free will, we can look at some other things in regard to servants and servanthood in our text and in God’s church.

First we must realize that God is speaking the words of our text, and that He is talking about ***His*** servant. From other portions of Scripture we see the use of the word servant. God’s Old Testament prophets were called servants of God. Jesus’ disciples and the apostles were called servants of God, or servants of Christ Jesus, who is God. What exactly does it mean to be a servant of God or a servant of Christ? In first Corinthians Paul says, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1 Cor. 4:1)

A steward takes care of the business of another, they are not allowed to do anything outside of the boundaries of the stewardship entrusted to them. Paul refers to himself and the other apostles as servants throughout all of his writings. He proclaims that all those who are called as ministers of the Gospel of Christ should consider themselves servants, or as the word is sometimes translated, slaves.

Pastors follow in this tradition; they also are servants of Christ. They are to have no will of their own. In regard to their service to their master, they make no choices of their own. They are only to be faithful to the One who has called them in service. They are to serve Christ by shepherding His sheep, serving His people, stewards of the mysteries of God’s grace entrusted to their care.

When it comes to discussions of theological matters and how those play out in practice, the pastor has no choices he can make. He cannot be flexible, even to his own will, but is bound solely to the word, the command, and the will of his Master. It is partly for this reason that many pastors wear a clerical collar, just like a dog does, to remind them of who is master.

Of course, some people come to their pastors trying to entice them or cajole them to go against the will of the Master and do instead, the will of the people. Sometimes when the pastor shows them the Master’s clear command and will, they still beg the pastor to do what they want. And when the servant of God does not do their will, they grumble against the pastor as if somehow he had a choice in the matter, as if it would be prudent and right for him to go against his Master’s will.

Dearly beloved of God, you also are servants of God in Christ Jesus. In fact, it is stated that you are slaves, for you were purchased with a price – that price being the life of the very Son of God. Nothing you have is your own, including your own body. You are simply servants, or stewards of everything God gives you.

But is this text talking about Isaiah or any other prophet being a servant? Is it about any disciple, apostle, or pastor as servant? Is this text about you and all other believers as servants? No!

Do you always treat that which God entrusted to your care as your Master wishes? Or are there times you are unfaithful and wicked servants? Too often we have disobeyed God’s will and word to us. We have wandered, each of us, unto his own way. Each of us has despised the Master’s Word and will at some point and time in our lives, and we are sure to do so again.

Being bought with the price, we are not to fall again into slavery to sin, and yet we do. As much as we are to be servants of God, the beckoning call of the devil and the world are voice which easily entice us. We become slaves to sin, for our sinful nature would rather hearken to the voices which keep our flesh happy, even when we know following those voices is entirely against the will of our Master.

Dearly beloved friends, this text is about God’s Servant, spelled with a capital “S.” The Servant is Christ, the One in whom God delights. It is He who brings forth justice, doing so by being a faithful Servant. He does not grow faint nor discouraged as He does the will of His Master. The Word of God which spoke all things into existence obediently took on human flesh and was born of the virgin named Mary. He was obedient to His parents in all things, even being about His Father’s business.

Look at the Gospel lesson for today. Jesus goes to John to be baptized. Jesus had no need for John’s baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. There was no sin in Jesus, yet He instructed John to baptize Him – to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus is baptized into the disobedience of every servant that ever lived or will live. And as He rose up out of the water, the master spoke about being well pleased with Him, with His obedience in perfect servitude.

Jesus was subservient to His Father’s will, even the Father’s will which instructed Him to submit even to the unjust laws of an unbelieving Roman nation. Even in the garden, when He knew the suffering and death which He was about to endure, said to the Father who was His Master, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. There was no reason for Him to undergo a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin,” there was no sin in Him. But the working out of your salvation begins with Christ’s baptism to fulfill all righteousness – to fulfill all ***YOUR*** righteousness and mine. Without sin, He is baptized into our sin and into our death. Christ sanctifies all water with His baptism.

Behold my Servant, God says. In the waters of baptism He has called you into righteousness; He has come to you to keep you; He has given His own Son as a covenant for you, obedient in your place; He gives His beloved Son as your light. Behold my Servant, and God opens your blind eyes to see His grace, His Son comes that you might be released from your dungeon, and brought into the light of His grace unto life everlasting.

Dearly beloved of God, the Master tells you, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.”

He brings justice to you today, but not justice as we deserve. Justice for your sin was meted out upon Him, on the cross, for there was your disobedience to the Master was paid in full. “Behold my servant,” the Master proclaims, and in the voice of your pastor, His servant gives you the justice purchased upon the cross, He speaks in Christ’s stead are cleansed of all sins.

Your disobedience is cast upon Christ. “Behold My servant!” His obedience becomes yours and mine in the Word we hear, a word of forgiveness for our disobedience to His will. This Word strengthens faith to live according to that will.

Your Master asks for your obedience – Behold my servant – take eat; take drink – this is His body and His blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, for the Master’s will is for your good – for your forgiveness – for your life – for your salvation. Eat and drink for the Servant of the Lord gave His life for you, and gives you the benefits of His obedience unto life everlasting.

God says, “Behold My servant,” and Christ comes to you with goodness and life. “Behold My servant,” who comes to grant you salvation. “Behold My servant,” have peace unto life everlasting. In the name of Jesus. Amen.