



First Sunday after the Epiphany
January 12, 2014

Pastor Daniel Naumann

Isaiah 42:1-7

MY CHOSEN SERVANT— WILL BRING JUSTICE



Justice. We are a people who appreciate proper justice. It bothers us when bad guys get away in the end of the movie because they don't get their proper justice. We have a ton of lawyer TV shows and police TV shows, and movies of the same, all that explore how justice is served, as they say in our society. We appreciate justice. The Israelites of Isaiah's day were about to experience real justice. Isaiah preached to a people of Judah in about 700 BC, after the time that the northern tribes of Israel has been defeated and scattered but before the southern tribes had been exiled to Babylon. But, prompted by the Spirit of God, Isaiah prophesied about things and people that would happen long after he died. Isaiah, throughout his book, talks about a servant. If you would read through the whole book, and especially the last 27 chapters, you would see references over and over again to "My servant" as the Lord talks about him. And to understand Isaiah's book properly, you have to know who this servant is that Isaiah is talking about. Well, fortunately for us Isaiah names him specifically. The servant was a man by the name of Cyrus.

Cyrus was a king of Persia, a powerful nation who overthrew Babylon. Babylon was the very nation that God used to bring justice against his people, a people who had rejected God and abandoned him for other false gods. So Babylon came and took the nation of Judah, those southern tribes, away into exile. Justice was served. The people got what they had coming. God did just as he said he would. But God remembered his people and long before they had even been taken into exile God promised that he would one day release them. It was 70 years after they had been taken. And he told them through the prophet Isaiah that this release would come from a ruler named Cyrus, a Persian after Babylon was defeated.

The faithful remnant of Israel in Babylon, those Jews who even though they didn't live in the promised land of Canaan like their forefathers, they knew God promised to send them back, they kept waiting for God

to fulfill this promise. We see it in people like Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubabel, and other late prophets of the Old Testament. Daniel, that prophet who lived in Babylon, even prayed to God to fulfill that promise to send them back after 70 years. And God did. Oh how those people must have longed for that return, for a different kind of justice. Oh how those people must have longed for God to bring them back to the land that had been taken from them. After all, it wasn't the faithful remnant that God had intended to discipline with exile, but the unfaithful idolaters among them. Yet that doesn't mean that those faithful were off the hook. They too needed to hear that law that God hated their sinful actions too, and they justly deserved exile. In fact they deserved a much longer exile than just 70 years in Babylon. They justly deserved an eternity in hell.

But years before he had enacted his justice against them, God made this promise through the prophet Isaiah, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations." And what is that justice? Not a justice that condemns but a justice that sets free. "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he established justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." Oh how that exiled remnant must have felt like an island detached from what they knew and what they longed for back home in the Promised Land. But they remembered God's promises and He sent them back. The people longed for this chosen one who would bring justice.

All this talk about the servant, the chosen one. Are we sure we have it right by simply labeling this servant as Cyrus, the Persian king? Or is there more to it than that? Well, as many of the great prophecies of the Old Testament, we find it true here as well that Isaiah couldn't have had in mind just one person when he talks about the servant of the Lord who would bring justice. You see while there are clearly things in Isaiah that point

to Cyrus as this servant who would release God's people, there are other things that just don't fit the bill as Cyrus being the only fulfillment. There *is* in fact more to it than that. This servant wouldn't just bring justice through a decree from his throne. He would release more captives than just the faithful Israelites in Babylon. After all, listen again to verse 1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations." How many nations would receive this justice, would benefit from this freedom? Well, all nations. Verses 5-7 say, "This is what God the LORD says—he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: 'I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.'"

Clearly, since Isaiah names Cyrus, we know that he is a partial fulfillment of these prophecies. But just as clearly there is someone else who must fulfill these promises even more, these promises made not just to the faithful remnant of Israel in exile, but to all the nations of the earth, to you and to me. You see it was never just Israel that needed saving. We needed saving too. We too deserved a very different kind of justice than what is described here. We deserved the justice that would have thrown us into the dungeon of hell forever, not just for 70 years. We deserved this because of our sin. And every time we crawl back into that blind darkness of our sin we are reminded of just how much we deserve this true, wrathful, just, judgment of our God. We, the bad guys, should not be allowed to be set free without any punishment at all. That isn't justice served. So God changed the very word justice.

The justice that this Servant would proclaim was very different than the justice we are familiar with. The true justice of God demands that sin be punished. That's why God sent another Chosen Servant, one who would take our place and live perfectly. That Chosen Servant was not Cyrus but it was none other than Jesus Christ himself. Jesus Christ, the Lord's chosen servant, was anointed with power by the Holy Spirit at his baptism to be this agent who would bring justice to the nations. Not justice that punishes us, but a justice that took on him the punishment we deserved. Jesus, throughout his entire life, was born under the law that we could not obey, and he actively obeyed it every single day of his

life. But that wasn't the whole plan of this very different kind of justice. When he was baptized he was anointed to be the Chosen One of God himself to take on the full punishment of our sin. He proclaimed this as the Lord's Anointed, as the Christ, the Messiah, the One who would preach about this wonderful Gospel justice that he came to bring. He preached about it for 3 years after his baptism. Then finally it came time for him to enact that different Gospel justice by going willingly to the cross to take the punishment for our sin.

And that's exactly what he did. He received the full brunt of God's perfect justice, justly punishing the sins of the entire world by slaying his Son on the cross, by turning his back on him there, by having Jesus suffer hell itself on the cross. Then he died. God died on the cross so that we would never have to. What strange justice this is! This justice that doesn't punish us for our sin, but punished the Chosen Servant instead. Then this Servant, this Chosen Servant of God, rose triumphantly from the dead assuring us that we too would rise just like he did. You see, because this Chosen Servant of God was anointed with power by God's Spirit at his baptism, he

then gave that baptism to us to make us also God's chosen children. That is the power of baptism. It connects us with this Chosen Servant of God and makes us God's own. It gives to us this justice, this true Gospel justice that God wanted so desperately for us all to receive through his Chosen Servant. And we do receive it. We receive that justice, not justice of sins punished, but justice of sins forgiven

in Christ, we receive it every time we hear about it again in his Word. We receive that justice of sins forgiven in Christ every time we remember our baptisms into his name, this Chosen Servant of God, where we were connected to him. We receive this justice of sins forgiven in Christ every time we come to the Lord's table for his supper, where we receive his true body and blood for our forgiveness.

Because of all this, the very same thing that God spoke over his Chosen Servant, his Son at his anointing in baptism, he also spoke to us at our anointing in baptism: "This is my Son, this is my daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." All of this is made possible because of the justice that Jesus came to bring and came to proclaim.

Justice is served in Christ. Not a justice that we are familiar with. Not a justice that we expect. Not a justice that is even of this world, but a justice that can only be found in God's Chosen Servant, Jesus Christ, who makes us God's chosen people when he brings God's true justice of sins forgiven. Amen.

This is my
BELOVED SON
with whom I am
WELL PLEASED