

"The Verdict"

Text: Isaiah 42:1-7

1/7/2018

I love legal thrillers. Whether it's a book, a movie, or a tv show, you invite me into a legal story and I'll be there 'til the end. The end of a legal story usually involves a verdict, and even if you never see the inside of a courtroom, there will be a verdict that we will all one day hear - the verdict that God will pronounce at the end of the "story" of mankind on the final Day of judgment. Let's look now together at what that verdict will be for us ...

As we do, we return to today's O.T. Lesson, where we hear again the prophet Isaiah say:

"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."(Isaiah 42: 1)

There are a couple of things that we need to look at a little closer to fully understand what Isaiah is saying there. First of all, the servant there is the nation of Israel. Isaiah wrote 4 of what are called "Servant Songs" in his book- ch. 49: 1-6; 50:4-9; 52: 13 - 53: 12; and of course the first of those songs from today's O.T. Lesson in 42:1-4. The last 3 of those songs (the first 3 I just listed for you - in 49, 50, and the long one in 52 & 53) speak clearly of our Lord Jesus - *Jesus Christ is the Servant* of the Lord. In fact, we hear from Isaiah 53 every Good Friday, when we gather to remember the death of our Lord by hearing how His Servant was:

" ... stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well being fell upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."(Isaiah 53 :4**b**-5)

But *the first* "Servant Song" of Isaiah actually speaks of *Israel* as the servant, as Isaiah says just verses before, in the previous chapter of his book:

"But you, *Israel, My servant*, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend ... You are *My servant*, I have chosen you and not rejected you."(41 :8, 9**b**)

Later on in this very same chapter of Isaiah: 42, in just verses after those of today's O.T. Lesson, Isaiah speaks of the unfaithfulness of Israel by saying:

"Who is blind but *My servant*, or so deaf as My messenger who I send?"(v.19)

There it's clear that, at the beginning of Isaiah's "Servant Songs" - including our O.T. Lesson today, Israel is the servant of the Lord.

The second thing we need to look at a little closer is the word "justice":

"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."(v.1)

That word "justice" could more accurately be rendered "verdict," because it speaks to what the Lord says in the verse immediately before that of today's O.T. Lesson, where He says that:

"Behold, all of them are false (or nothing); their works are worthless, their *molten images* are wind and emptiness."(41 :29)

With those words the Lord spoke His verdict against the false gods of Babylon (the "molten images" that were "wind and emptiness"). In fact, Isaiah's words are set in the context of Israel's having been carted off to Babylon in exile. As Israel dwelt in that land of false gods (some 2,000 of them, it's estimated), she was exhorted by the prophet Isaiah to remember her calling as the "Servant of the LORD," the servant who would sound forth the LORD's verdict of judgment against all false gods. As Isaiah goes on to say, Israel was to serve as 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."(vs. 6b-7)

BUT there was a problem with that: that "Servant of the LORD," who was supposed to be a light to the nations by calling them to repent of their sin of idolatry, had herself been guilty of it! In fact, that's why the context of Isaiah's words today was Israel's exile in Babylon: she had been carted off there as a result of her unfaithfulness to God; Israel herself had stumbled blindly in the darkness of unbelief. Having Israel serve as a light to the nations was a lot like having the blind lead the blind. As Isaiah went on to write, in words I quoted before:

"Who is blind but My servant, or so deaf as My messenger who I send?"(v.19)

That was the verdict of God against His very own people: they were blind and deaf to Him.

Thank goodness there's another Servant- the One Isaiah writes about in the last of his "Servant Songs" (53:5, from which we quoted earlier), the One Who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities: the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah writes in the first verse of today's O.T. Lesson that the Lord's servant was One Who had the Lord's Spirit upon Him. And in today's Gospel we hear that, at Jesus' Baptism:

" ... the Spirit of God descend(ed) like a dove and (came) to rest on Him; ... "(Matthew 3: 16)

The LORD says in Isaiah that His Servant is One in Whom His soul delights (42:1). And in today's Gospel Matthew writes that, at Jesus' Baptism, a voice from heaven said:

" ... This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased."(3:17) i.e.,

"This is My *Servant*, with Whom My soul *delights*."(*p-phrase* of Isaiah)

The Lord Jesus Christ bore the judgment of God's verdict against sin - the sin of Israel, our sin, the sin of everyone who's ever walked the face of God's creation - in His death on the cross, and His resurrection changed the verdict to "NOT guilty." As Isaiah writes: "By His stripes we are healed" (53:5), and we are. For - to use Isaiah's words - we've been set free from our sins like prisoners who've been freed from a dungeon (42:7). By the light of forgiveness - God's forgiveness, for the sake of His Son - we no longer stumble in the darkness of unbelief. With the forgiveness of Christ, we now walk in the light of faith.

That's important. Because we all have our own fair share of struggle with idolatry. It's true. The Scripture says:

"I trust in Thee, O Lord. I say: 'Thou art my God.'"(Psalm 31: 14)

Which means that that in which we place our trust is our God. Luther's explanation of the First Commandment puts it well when it says that we are to:

" ... fear, love, and *trust* in God above all things."

and we all have plenty of things we place our trust in besides the only true God: Christ Jesus.

We can also think of idolatry in terms of adoration. I even heard a professor at the seminary (Prof. Reed Lessing) say that when an object or person goes from being an item of affection to an item of adoration, then you have an idol in your hands. Again, how many of us haven't experienced that? How many of us experience it still, every day/week/month/year of our lives? It's all idolatry. And Isaiah would have us know that idolatry is blindness - stumbling around in the darkness of being less than God created us to be.

But in His Son - the *true* "Servant of the LORD": the Lord Jesus Christ - that has all been taken care of. For in His Baptism Jesus joined us on this road of sin, beginning a journey He would walk for all to Calvary's cross. In today's Gospel, at the hands of John the Baptist, He was anointed with God's Spirit, becoming the "Servant of the LORD," indeed of all, to answer for our sins. In Him, as we said before, we walk in the light of God's forgiveness. In Him, we are every 'bit of what God created us to be.

Which brings us back to where we began and my mention to you of my love of legal thrillers, and what usually includes the taught drama of a verdict. When it comes to the legality of God, there's no thrill to it; no drama. For the verdict of God upon all false gods - all that would compete with Him for adoration and trust - has already been heard, and borne, by His Son. As that voice from heaven said at Jesus' Baptism:

" ... with (Him: Jesus) I am well pleased."

Because of our having been joined to that "Servant of the LORD" in our Baptism, God is well pleased with us too. That's the only verdict that matters -

- In Jesus' † Name,

Amen!