

Then to the Gentile

A sermon preached by Dr. John Clayton at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Fort Smith, Arkansas on March 24, 2019.

Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, 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 12:15–21.

Jesus broke the rules (not to be confused with the perfect law of God): He healed a man on the Sabbath. It wasn't the first time He had thwarted the rules and regulations of the “religious right” of the day. Using the written Word of God, the living Word revealed, “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:13), and for His words and deeds the Pharisees conspired against Him as to how they might murder Him. He who knows all things certainly knew their plans, but the time of His atoning sacrifice had not yet come. So, the Great Physician continued to heal the sick.

Just as Jesus' miracles of healing confirmed His teaching, and they together confirmed His identity as the Messiah, Jesus ordered that His identity be not yet revealed. Those who had eyes to see and ears to hear were not yet to use their mouths to speak of His identity. This is perplexing to us in an age in which the church is to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). We are, in fact, ordered to make Him known. Why then did Jesus order those who followed Him, those who were healed by Him, those who believed in Him, not to make Him known?

Matthew answers this question by quoting, what was likely his own translation, from the forty-second chapter of Isaiah. In context, this passage of Isaiah describes a man who by the power of God lives as the perfect child of Israel. As the perfect Israelite, only He can save, not only the children of Israel but people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Providing greater detail of the Messiah introduced in Isaiah's prophecy, this perfect son of Israel is described as the hope of the Jew *and* the Gentile.

Who is this prophesied Messiah, and how may He be identified? Isaiah describes Him in at least seven different ways: He is a divinely-chosen Servant, a soul-pleasing Beloved, a multi-national justice Preacher, an unbroken bruised Reed, a quenchless smoldering Wick, a justice-delivering Victor, and a gentile-hoping Savior. This is in fact a prophetic description of the Jewish Messiah, Christ Jesus the Lord. And, as the prophesied Messiah, Jesus would fulfill each of these descriptive titles, arriving at the fulfillment upon a bloody cross, an atoning death, a victorious resurrection. Let's consider each of these titles more closely.

A Divinely-chosen Servant

The Lord declared through Isaiah, “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen.” Unique to Matthew, his translation of the verb “chosen” implies an exclusive relationship, between God and Servant. God has chosen His one and only servant for the purpose of salvation, a truth revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Indeed, in the intra-Trinitarian love of God the Father,

God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, it was purposed that the Son would serve as our Savior. The Apostle Peter explains, “He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Pet. 1:20 NIV). What God the Father purposed, God the Son accomplished, and God the Holy Spirit applies: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NASB). So it was, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Dear Christian, consider the magnitude of this truth: The One chosen by God is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). No one comes to God the Father except through the divinely-chosen Servant, Jesus Christ our Lord. There is only one Servant, one Christ, the chosen One of God, the soul-pleasing Beloved.

A Soul-pleasing Beloved

Of whom can God say, “my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased”? There is only one who pleases the soul of God, of whom God the Father said from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Such heavenly favor did not wait until or start at Jesus’ baptism. The love of the Father for the Son preceded the incarnation. He was, is, and will always be the Beloved. So, in His earthly ministry He always accomplished His Father’s pleasure, to perfection.

As beautiful as this truth is, it may be startling to us to hear how the soul-pleasing Beloved of God speaks similarly of His love for us. Jesus tell His disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (John 15:9). The Beloved of God is the Mediator of the love of God to His children. In this sense, who the Beloved is also defines what the Beloved does. “God is love” (1 John 4:8), indeed.

And, just as the Son did all that the Father commanded, so also the Son commands us, “Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:9-10). It is Good News, the gospel, that we become the beloved children of God through the atoning work of the soul-pleasing Beloved. This is a gospel worth preaching! So Jesus came, preaching the gospel by the Holy Spirit, Good News for the world, as a multi-national justice Preacher.

A Multi-national Justice Preacher

There is much said about justice in our culture today, and Jesus has been included into aspects of it. Often characterized as an inspired social worker, Jesus is inserted as the example of delivering social justice for the oppressed. The problem is that our cultural discussion of justice does not include the justice of God. God is holy and just, demanding all made in His image live justly before Him. We have not. We do not.

Therefore, the most just thing God should do to all who fall short of His glory is to pour out His wrath upon us. As Jonathan Edwards preached, “The bow of God’s wrath is bent, and the arrow

made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without and promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.” If the world wants justice, it should get it, and will on Judgment Day. But, by God’s grace alone through faith in Christ alone to the glory of God alone, we do not get what we deserve.

To the cross the Beloved went, and upon Him justice was served: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). “‘Til on that cross that Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied” (*In Christ Alone*). Because the Beloved Son came to accomplish what the Father had purposed, Jesus came preaching the gospel of God’s salvation, a message of justice first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. As Isaiah prophesied, the “offspring” of Israel would be not only in Israel but would “be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed” (Isa. 61:9). By virtue of His perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection, He brings all who believe on Him for salvation into a just relationship with our Holy God. In order to accomplish this justice, according to Isaiah, in God’s sovereign plan of redemption, “it pleased the LORD to bruise him” (Isa. 53:10 KJV), a bruised yet unbroken Reed.

An Unbroken Bruised Reed

As a means of support, like a tent pole, a reed is necessarily straight. A damaged reed is easily broken and of no value. That the Son of God came to earth to die sounds as absurd as supporting a tent with a broken pole, a lack of wisdom, an act of foolishness. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:18, 22–24).

Christ became a bruised yet unbroken reed that He might save us. Innocent yet condemned before the Jewish council for claiming to be the Son of God as the Son of God, He was mocked, blindfolded, and beaten. Found guiltless before Pilate and silent before Herod, He was mocked, beaten, and condemned to death by crucifixion. Even upon the cross, He was not broken, but voluntarily gave up His spirit to death proclaiming, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). The light of His life had seemingly been extinguished, but “a smoldering wick he will not quench.”

A Quenchless Smoldering Wick

As Jesus taught, you do not light the wick of a lamp and put it under a basket; you put it on a stand to light the room. What good is a smoldering wick that gives no light? Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). What good does it do to kill the light of the world?

Yet, as the Apostle Peter preached on Pentecost, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by

it” (Acts 2:23-24). Though the light seemed quenched, he was resurrected to shine His glory unto all nations. Consider the significance of the resurrection here: the gospel of Isaiah translated here in Matthew is not only the prophesy of a good man to come, or a servant to suffer; it is a gospel of a chosen, Spirit-filled, meek-but-not-silent, bruised-but-not-broken, smoldering-but-not-quenched, justice-delivering Victor.

A Justice-delivering Victor

The significance of Jesus is not just that He was a good man, yet He was perfect. It was not just that He died a martyr’s death, yet His death was efficaciously atoning. It was that He was perfectly sinless, and died bearing the just wrath of God, and arose victoriously from the dead, delivering perfect and eternal justice for God and His people: “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). The resurrection of Christ is the victorious pinnacle of human history, and is the hope of all who believe, both Jew and Gentile.

A Gentile-hoping Savior

The Apostle Paul preached, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17). We are not reconciled to a holy and just God by our ethnicity, family, or good works. But, by God’s grace we believe in the divinely-chosen Servant, the soul-pleasing Beloved, the multi-national justice Preacher, the unbroken bruised Reed, the quenchless smoldering Wick, the justice-delivering Victor, our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord.