

The Vindication of Jesus

Isaiah 53:10-12

Most of you know the name, Timothy McVeigh. He was convicted and executed for the Oklahoma City bombings that took place in 1995. Most who hear the name Timothy McVeigh think, "He was obviously guilty and got exactly what he deserved." It is almost impossible to imagine that his name would ever be cleared. We can't conceive of the possibility that some new evidence coming to light that would vindicate him.

We need to appreciate the fact that the same thing could be said of Jesus Christ after He was crucified. It was hard to fathom that Jesus could possibly be vindicated. After all, the Jewish authorities had condemned Him for blasphemy. The Roman authorities had sentenced Him to death for inciting a riot. The masses were against Him; they wanted Him to be executed through crucifixion. Perhaps worst of all, it appeared as if God had condemned Jesus because to be crucified (hung on a tree) meant to be cursed by God (Galatians 3:13, Deut. 21:23). After Jesus had been crucified and buried, nobody - not even His closest followers - could imagine that His name could ever be cleared, that He could ever be vindicated.

There was really only one thing that could vindicate Jesus: being raised from the dead. That is exactly what the New Testament claims happened. The early followers of Jesus went around the entire known world arguing that the resurrection of Jesus demanded that people consider the teachings and claims of His life.

This morning we are going to examine Isaiah 53:10-12, the fifth and final stanza of a passage describing the ministry of the Servant of the Lord. We looked at the first three stanzas last Sunday and the fourth stanza on Friday night. This final stanza looks *beyond* the Servant's suffering to His vindication. Written over 700 years before the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, this passage speaks of One who would die as our substitute and who would then be vindicated. While this passage doesn't explicitly teach the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, what is said here is really incomprehensible apart from the resurrection. What we'll see is that what is implicit in this Old Testament passage is made very explicit in the New Testament.

Jesus' vindication is seen in His "Offspring" (i.e., the Church) (53:10) Verse 10 claims that the Servant's suffering was the will of God. The Servant would not merely be a victim of circumstances; He would suffer in accordance with God's sovereign plan.

10 But the LORD was pleased
To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;
If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering,
He will see *His* offspring,
He will prolong *His* days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

We've already been told several times in this passage why the Lord was pleased to pour out His wrath on His Servant in this way: God was pleased to crush His Servant as our substitute. Instead of crushing us for our sin, God crushed His Servant in our place. When you read the

Gospels, you see that Jesus Himself had this understanding; He understood that the things that happened to Him were happening according to the God's sovereign will. For example, at the "last supper" Jesus let the disciples know that Judas would betray Him: "the Son of Man is going as it has been determined" (Luke 22:22). When Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and Peter tried to defend Him with his sword, Jesus explained that "the Scriptures must be fulfilled, that it must happen this way" (Matthew 26:54).

The third line says, "If He would render Himself as a guilt offering" that certain things would happen. In the old covenant, the guilt offering (or "trespass offering") emphasized the guiltiness of the person bringing the offering. As we saw in the third stanza (vv. 4-6), the Servant took our guilt upon Himself as our substitute.

Isaiah says that *if* the Servant is sacrificed as a guilt offering, three things would happen:

He will see *His* offspring,
He will prolong *His* days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

These are classic expressions of the blessings promised in the Abrahamic covenant. Seeing your offspring/children (and your children's children) was a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 128:6 "Indeed, may you see your children's children."). These descendants of the Servant are the same descendants that God promised to Abraham. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be "more numerous than the stars in the sky." We find out in the New Testament that Abraham's descendants are not merely physical descendants, but spiritual descendants as well – those who have the same faith that Abraham had. Beyond His death, the Servant would be vindicated when He would see His offspring.

Having "prolonged days" was another blessing from God (as opposed to having your days cut short; Deut. 17:20, Prov. 28:16). Of course this makes sense after the resurrection, since Jesus has risen, never to die again. The bottom line (of verse 10) is that the "good pleasure [or "will"] of the LORD will prosper [be successful] in His [the Servant's] hand." The will of God - here primarily the salvation of the people - was never more successful than when it rested in the Servant's hand.

All of these covenantal blessings point to the Servant's vindication. Yes, he would suffer horrific things as a guilt offering; but beyond His humiliation and suffering, He would be resurrected to see His descendants and have prolonged days. In other words, ***the existence of the Church points to the vindication of Jesus Christ***. Everybody expected the crucifixion to be the end of the "Jesus movement" in first-century Israel; the disciples had scattered in fear when Jesus was crucified. But everything changed when they arrived at the tomb on that Sunday morning and found the tomb empty. When Jesus appeared to them in person, they were convinced that the unimaginable had happened: Jesus was raised from the dead and everything He had said and done was vindicated.

The early disciples went around telling people that Jesus had died for sin and risen from the dead. The result was that 75 years later there were "believers" [i.e., "offspring"] all across the

entire Mediterranean world and beyond. Without the vindication of the resurrection, Jesus' influence would have been snuffed out. The fact that we are sitting here this morning worshipping Him is more evidence that Jesus was an acceptable guilt offering on our behalf, that He did not stay in the grave, but that He was resurrected and forever lives in the presence of God.

Jesus' vindication is seen in His Satisfaction (53:11) Verse 11 speaks of the Servant seeing God's blessing and being satisfied.

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see *it and* be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.

"Anguish of soul" is an appropriate description of Jesus' suffering. The night before His crucifixion, as Jesus contemplated what lay ahead, He commented to Peter, James and John, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death . . ." (Matthew 26:38). Upon the cross Jesus cried out to heaven, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46) We cannot begin to understand the anguish of soul that Jesus willingly endured.

But the result of His anguish of soul was the ***satisfaction*** of seeing God's will accomplished through Him. Specifically, "the Righteous One" will "justify/make righteous" the many. The blood of bulls and goats (the old covenant sacrifices) couldn't make people righteous. Only the sacrifice of the Righteous One could make people righteous (i.e., right with God and able to live upright lives). This verse predicts that Jesus would one day "see and be satisfied" with the righteousness that He bought for "the many."

It is interesting that in Romans 4 Paul explicitly links the resurrection of Jesus with the accomplishment of our justification.

25 *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

Because Jesus' death brought about our justification (our righteousness), God raised Him up. God vindicated Jesus through the resurrection, confirming that His death was an acceptable sacrifice for our sins. ***The risen Christ sees this and is now satisfied.*** He delights in what He has done. Even with all the sin and tragedy in this world, Jesus is satisfied that His sacrifice accomplished exactly what He intended. If you have accepted His sacrifice by faith you are declared righteous – you are justified! Jesus is satisfied in what He accomplished in you.

The Scriptures teach that once we enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we now have the power and the privilege of living a life that pleases Him. We now follow Jesus as His disciples. In a few weeks we'll finish up our study through the Sermon on the Mount in which this lifestyle is described. When we focus on this lifestyle it's easy to notice how inconsistent and immature we are at times. It's easy to become disheartened and wonder if we'll

ever really make progress. Perhaps there is some sin that is particularly discouraging to you; or perhaps you lack some virtue (such as patience or kindness) that you find troubling. The thing I would say to you on this Easter morning is that the resurrection of Jesus confirms that He is satisfied in what He has already accomplished in you. When He sees you, He is satisfied. His satisfaction in you isn't based on your performance; it is based on what He has accomplished through His death and resurrection. Take courage in your walk with Christ. Because He is risen, you are justified. Jesus is satisfied in what He accomplished in you.

Jesus' vindication is seen in His Exaltation (53:12) Verse 12 wraps up this entire passage. The first verse – back in 52:13 – had spoken of the Servant being “high and lifted up and greatly exalted.” This verse returns to the truth of Jesus' exaltation.

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

As a victorious commander who enjoys the spoils of war, the Servant would eventually be numbered among the great [or “many”] and the strong. He would experience scorn, rejection, and humiliation; but after His death God would exalt and vindicate Him.

In case there was any doubt about the cause and effect relationship between the Servant's suffering and exaltation, the last three lines set things straight. He would be exalted ***because*** He “poured out Himself [“His soul”] to death. The Servant was “numbered among the transgressors” in order to be “crushed” (v. 5) as their substitute. The sinless One “bore the sin of many” and “interceded for the transgressors.” In other words, this Servant stepped in and intervened (see 59:16 for another example of “intercede”) for sinners and transgressors so they wouldn't have to bear their own sin. Because the Servant thus fulfilled God's purposes for His life, God vindicated Him. Because He humbled Himself to the point of death, God highly exalted Him (Philippians 2).

After the resurrection, Jesus disciples looked back at passages such as Isaiah 53 (and Psalm 16 and Psalm 110) and concluded that Jesus ***had*** to be exalted, that He ***had*** to be triumphant over the grave. And that's exactly the message that they explained to people. Acts 2, for example, describes how Peter stood up in the midst of a crowd in Jerusalem and said:

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- 23 this *Man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. 24 "And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Again, a few verses later we read:

32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Verse 36 reads:

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter argued that if Jesus was indeed given this triumphant status by God, people couldn't ignore Him. Therefore, people had to decide whether they were for Him or against Him, whether they believed that His death paid for sin or not.

The same thing is true today. We are each confronted with these eyewitness accounts that God vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the dead. The good news of the resurrection is that you can become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The only thing that stands between you and God is your sin. Since Jesus died for your sin, you don't have to. You can put your faith in Jesus Christ and be declared righteous in the sight of God. Instead of living your life with the burden and guilt of your sin, you can live your life in freedom - freedom to love God and do His will. I am going to pray a prayer that expresses faith in Christ; if you are ready to accept His payment for your sin, pray along silently while I pray.