

## INTRODUCTION

People of God, obedience to the Lord is costly. But St Augustine was right when he said that the cost of obedience is actually quite small when compared to the cost of disobedience. In Isaiah 50:4-9 the Servant of the Lord explains what his obedience to God cost him, and what he was able to purchase for us by his obedience.

The passage is arranged around four references to the Lord YHWH. The first two are about how the Lord YHWH prepares the Servant for Ministry, and the last two are about how the LORD YHWH stands with His Servant in Adversity as he pays the cost of obedience. And then in v. 10 and 11, an appeal is made to the reader to either follow in the steps of the Servant of the Lord, or to follow himself. Obedience is costly, to be sure. But disobedience is costlier still. This gives us our basic outline.

## SHEMA

In v 4. the Servant of the Lord says that *YHWH gave him the tongue of the Learned, so that he should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear – shema – as those who are taught.* The source of his learned tongue comes from his learned ear. God awakens him every morning to speak to him, and the servant of the Lord hears and listens to God.

Hearing and listening is the word Shema, in Hebrew, and it does not just mean hearing sounds, but hearing and listening with the purpose of obeying. In fact, there isn't even a word for obey in Hebrew, it is just a derivative of the word Shema. Listen to me, hear me, implies obedience.

## WORDS FOR THE WEARY

The Lord awakens the servant every morning with the word of command, and the servant is ready to hear and obey. He is so close to God that his very first thoughts and actions are, I am listening Lord, what do you want me to do? What is the command that You give me to obey?

Well God has gifted the Servant for a particular ministry, the ministry to Preach. God has given him the *tongue of the learned so that he may sustain with a word those who are weary*.

The Servant's obedience is found in the execution of the ministry of Word. He is called to preach God's words. He has the tongue of the learned, He is wise, and he knows how to speak comforting words that sustain the weary. The Servant's obedience and mission is defined by His ear to hear, and his mouth to speak.

Interestingly in our Gospel lesson this morning in Mark 9, Jesus encounters a man who has been possessed by a demon, and Jesus casts the demon out him saying, "*You mute and deaf spirit, come out of him and never enter him again.*" Last weeks Gospel lesson also included a story where Jesus healed a man who was deaf and mute. What these stories tell us, people of God, is that unlike the Servant of the Lord, we are deaf and mute, spiritually speaking.

Because of sin we no longer wake up hearing the voice of the Lord ready to obey as soon as we awake. Rather, since the dawn of time we have been in rebellion. The servant of the Lord has a mouth to speak words the sustain and give life, but we are like mute people, or worse, our throats are open graves and the venom of asps is under our lips. Our mouths were created to imitate God so that we might speak life giving words of comfort - but these demons have cast down into fire and flood, silencing us with the exception of a frothy gurgling. But Jesus rebukes the spirit, calling it a mute and deaf spirit, and frees the man of his demonic oppression.

Restored humanity in Christ is a person who has faculty over the ears to hear and their mouths to speak. So that we can be like the Servant who is ready to hear the word of the Lord first thing in the morning, even understanding that we are awakened by God with his command to hear his word, so that the first words we speak are words of life and praise to God.

So the Servant is obedient and faithful precisely in those areas that are most bound up with our obedience to God, the ears and the mouth.

Thus in verse 5 the Servant of the Lord says that YHWH *opened his ear and he was not rebellious. He did not turn away*. Now, why would he be tempted to turn back in the first place? Because in v. 6 it suggests that the servant's obedience to hear the word of God and to speak His words of comfort to the weary, leads him to being attacked. He says, *I gave my back to those who struck me, And my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard. I did not hide my face from shame and spitting*.

There seems to be a connection and relation between the servants suffering and obedience to the comforting words he is commanded to speak. In this fallen world, our obedience to God is met with spiritual and sometimes physical attacks. Jesus Christ preaching the word of God, and speaking comforting words of forgiveness to weary sinners who are afflicted by their sins, makes the Jewish leadership angry. *Who can forgive sins except God alone?*, they say. And so, they seek to kill Christ.

Christ's obedience to hear God's commands and to speak comforting words of life are tied directly to the suffering that He underwent for us. Christ knew what his mission to obey God and to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom would cost him. He knew what was in the heart of man, and how man would respond to his message. But that did not deter our Lord. He was not rebellious to the mission His Father gave Him, he did not turn his back and run from His calling, just because he was to face opposition. Christ willingly and obediently went to preach good news to the poor, and for his efforts he received blows from his enemies. *He gave his back to those who struck it, he gave his face to the those who pulled out his beard, he did not hide his face from spitting and shame*.

Christ's ministry of comfort comes to us not just by way of his words, but also by way of his suffering and death on our behalf. What greater comfort is there than the message that Christ suffered and died to forgive you of your

sins and to make you a child of God? The preaching of the message of His suffering and death on our behalf is the message of good news and is the comforting words to weary that he is commissioned to speak.

In the Service for Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer, there are the comforting words given to the people after they confess their sins and are absolved. It says, "Hear what comfortable words our Savior Christ saith unto all who truly come to Him.

Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.

So God loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Hear also what St Paul saith. This is a true saying and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Hear also what St John saith. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins.

Lift up your hearts...We lift them up to the Lord...

The comforting words of Jesus Christs death for us to forgive us is a word that sustains weary sinners and lifts us up into the presence of God.

Christ speaks a word in season to him who is weary, and Christ's learned tongue gives the comforting message of the forgiveness of our sins in His suffering and death on our behalf. This is the reason the Father sent him, and so Christ did not turn away from God's command. He did not turn away. He did turn his back to those who struck it with whips, and he turned his face to those who punched him and hit him, and who ripped out his beard, and who spit in his face, but he did it in obedience to God. He suffered shame and disgrace, so that you would receive glory and honor and comfort.

## DESPISING THE SHAME

V. 7 says *But the Lord YHWH helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced.* The servant receives help from YHWH. Despite giving his back to blows and his beard to be pulled out, and his face to disgrace and spitting, he was not disgraced. Instead, he was more determined to finish his mission. He set his face like a flint, knowing that he shall not be put to shame.

This seems to be the verse that Luke 9:51 is based upon when it says, *"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."* Jesus' face is set like a flint to go to Jerusalem to receive shame and mockery and suffering death on the cross, because he knows that resurrection and exaltation is on the other side.

Hebrews 12:2 says we are to look to Jesus, *"the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne God."*

## JUSTIFIED

He says, *I know that I will not be ashamed.* How does he know that? Because *He is near who justifies me;* Other translations say, vindicate.

The one who is near to justify the servant, to Justify Jesus is referring to YHWH God. God commissioned the Servant to speak comforting words and to be obedient even unto death. In fact, to be obedient by giving his life up to shame and disgrace and death on the cross to save us. But he is not ashamed because YHWH is near.

God is near with his presence, on the one hand. But he is also near in time to offer justification and vindication. This is court room, judicial language that is being used here. The Servant is stricken, smitten, and afflicted, because of His obedience to God. No amount of torture and death can deter him from obeying God. In fact, he knows that it is precisely because of his obedience to God that he is suffering, but he also knows that God will vindicate him,

and justify him, declare him innocent and righteous. This happens just three days later when Christ was resurrected from the dead.

It is in the resurrection of Christ that God judged decidedly on Christ's behalf against his adversaries. Christ was crucified because they said He blasphemed and made himself equal with God, and so he deserved to die. The problem was that He and the Father are one, He is co-equal with God, and so the Father reversed the decision of the Jewish court and reversed the punishment of death by the Romans, by raising him to life again.

The Apostle Paul sees that Christ's resurrection from the dead is not only Christ's justification and vindication that he was not guilty, but righteous. And because we are united to Christ, his resurrection is our justification too. And by being united to Christ by faith, we too are now reckoned as righteous, and vindicated before the court of God. As Paul says in Rom. 4 that the declaration of righteous *will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,* <sup>25</sup> *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* Rom. 4:24-25

And so, knowing that God is near to Him and will vindicate and justify him, the servant calls for his adversary to rise up and stand toe to toe with him. Who is it that brings the charges against the Servant of the Lord? Who is it that contends against him? Who is the adversary?

It is none other than Satan, of course, which is what his name means: The Adversary. Which, again, is a judicial court room title. Satan contends against Jesus to bring him under the curse and wrath of God and unto death. And he does the same against you. But God vindicated Christ when he raised him from the dead, and then seated him at his right hand, high and exalted above Satan and all the demonic and angelic powers that the Adversary once had position over, in the heavenlies, with the verdict that He is righteous, and so are all who place their faith in Him.

## NO CONDEMNATION

And so, the Servant says, *Behold, The Lord YHWH helps me; who will declare me guilty? Who is he who condemns me? Who is it that declares me guilty? It is the role of the adversary to do just that. But because he has been thrown down and Christ is exalted, we hear the sweet words of Romans 8:33 ff – “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us.”*

Who is seeking to condemn you, people of God? The Devil, the world, your flesh, and even your own conscience at times. Because of the great salvation that Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord accomplished for you in His obedience unto death, there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God reckons you as Holy and righteous in Jesus Christ.

Just like when Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery in John 8 who was about to be stoned to death, and Jesus told them whoever is without sin cast the first stone. And they all departed. And Christ says these comforting words to her: *“Where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, No one Lord. Neither do I condemn you. He said; go and from now on sin no more.”*

Christ sent her accusers fleeing. There is no one who can stand to accuse us either, people of God. None of them can bring a charge against you, because they cannot bring a charge against Christ. Christ is truly God’s elect one, and you are in Him by faith, and he has been delivered from death, he has the keys to death and hades, and he is at the right hand of God ruling and reigning over all things on your behalf, and is interceding before the Father for you.

And so, whatever the Father says about Christ, he says about you who believe in Christ. God declared Christ “justified,” and “vindicated” against all charges of sin, and the same vindication is yours.

## **DIVINE IRONY**

V. 9 continues, *Behold, they will all wear themselves out like a garment, the moths will eat them up.* The Adversary and his forces who attempt to shame and condemn the servant of the Lord come to nothing. They wear out like a garment. Moths eat up their plans. Psalm 7:16 says – *“His mischief returns upon his head, and on his own skull his violence descends.”* In trying to destroy Jesus and His people, and condemn us for sin, the cross only lead to Christ’s and our resurrection and justification, and the Satan’s defeat.

Just like when Haman was hanged from his own gallows he had erected for Mordecai, so too do all the plans of the enemy fail and turn back on their heads for their own destruction. Christ’s Crucifixion lead to His resurrection. His humiliation lead to His exaltation. His Death lead to life. The declaration that he was Guilty leads to his justification and vindication with a reversal that he is righteous. Jesus died, but in His death destroyed the Devil. This is the beautiful irony of the Gospel of Christ, and it is yours by faith in Christ, the Servant of the Lord.

## **TRUST AND OBEY**

And so, v. 10 and 11, say this:

*“Who among you fears the LORD?  
Who obeys (shemas) the voice of His Servant?  
Who walks in darkness  
And has no light?  
Let him trust in the name of the LORD  
And rely upon his God.*

Here an appeal is made to the reader, to respond to the Servant of the Lord. As the Servant of the Lord *shema’d* God’s word, and obeyed, which one of you is going to follow in His train and shema the voice the of the Servant? Christ feared God and obeyed him, no matter the cost. His obedience was costly. He was ready to face every opposition in order to obey God. People of God, we need to abandon any thoughts we may have that our Christian

life is supposed to a life of ease and comfort and very little exertion and effort. We are to love God with all our might. We are to be ready from the first moment of waking up in the morning, and even while we sleep, that we are going to be under the attack of sin, the flesh, and the devil and the world. Which one of you will follow Christ and be ready to hear and obey and have the word of God on your lips every moment of the day in order to be obedient to God?

The reason why we slack off in our whole hearted obedience to God is, well, because we are sinners. But if we could psychologize that for a second, we are people who seek comfort and ease at every turn. We are lazy, we try to exert the minimal effort possible at all times. And when we perceive that our obedience is going to require of us some serious spiritual and physical strength and exertion, we simply just do not try that hard to follow God and obey his commands to hear him, because we think we are preserving ourselves. But Christ himself said that if you seek to save your life you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and the gospel's sake, you will find it. Obedience is costly.

### **GIRDING YOURSELF WITH FLAMES**

But v. 11 teaches us that disobedience is more costly. He addresses those who would refuse to trust in the Lord, saying:

*<sup>11</sup> Look, all you who kindle a fire,  
Who encircle yourselves with sparks:  
Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled—  
This you shall have from My hand:  
You shall lie down in torment.*

The idea in the sentence of *encircling yourself or girding yourself with sparks*, is the imagery of tying a torch on to your garments so you can use both hands to find your way in the dark. But this obviously will not work, it will only burn you.

In the previous verse the word was given to those who walk in darkness and have no light that they should trust in the name of the Lord. The darkness there I take to be the oppression that comes to the servant and his followers because of their dedication to love God and obey Him. It is the cost of their obedience.

So those who walk in the darkness of hardship and oppression due to obedience to God, they hold on with both hands to the servant of the Lord, trusting in Him, and they will be preserved, vindicated, justified. Just as Christ was.

But v. 11 warns that those who trust in their own way, those who seek to preserve their own life, who try to get themselves out of the darkness by conjuring up their own fire - they are like those who tie a torch to their garments. The end result is, you're gonna get burned. In fact, God promises them this, "this you have from my hand: You shall lie down in torment."

Many people think that they can escape the difficulties that accompany being a Christian in the world by making certain compromises with the world, the flesh, and even the devil. Instead of trusting God to bring them through the death like experience and believing God will raise them to life and vindicate them, instead of loving God with all their strength, they instead try to illuminate the darkness of the difficulties that come with discipleship, by tying a torch of fire to their own garments. They try to alleviate the burden of following God through their own crafty schemes.

But whatever you think you're getting out of being half hearted in your devotion to God, whatever deals you are trying to make with the world, the flesh, and the devil, so as to not have to suffer for the faith, it will only burn you in the present, and even worse, God promises that it will lead to eternal torture.

Jesus Christ was not ashamed of God's word, he loved and delighted in and obeyed every single one of God's words. He lived by every word that

proceeded out of the mouth of God. And it cost him his life. Do you think it will cost you anything less? We live in the midst of an adulterous and sinful generation, and so obedience to God and love for Him and His word will cost us dearly. We need to be ready and to count the cost and if necessary, lose our lives our reputations and families and jobs and friends and freedom and comforts and conveniences, and maybe even access to goods and services – if that is what it takes to be faithful to God's calling on your life.

When the world is designed to work against you because you are seeking to be obedient to God, you have two choices. You can compromise and try to make your life easier and comfortable now, you can tie a torch to your belt.

Or you can be faithful unto death like Christ, and refuse to compromise, and save your soul. God says that such comfort and ease that you acquire for yourself now, at the cost of being faithful, will only result in you lying down in torment later. Obedience to the Lord is costly. But not nearly as costly as disobedience is.

So people of God, let us not succumb to the temptation of our day to stay away from costly obedience. Let us love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, hearing the sweet words of comfort of the Gospel which come from his mouth, that all who place their trust in Him will be justified. Amen.