

## God's Servant Is Mighty to Save

‡ stained in blood (vv.1-3)

‡ redeeming in vengeance (v.4)

‡ working salvation alone (vv.5-6)

In the Name of God's Servant, our Savior Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

One of my history professors used to say, "A society that loses its morals loses its nerve." Nothing seems more true again this week after another round of terrorist attacks. Government officials may get the brunt of criticism for failing to understand the religious aspects of Islam and Jihad, but I'm convinced the problem began generations ago in the church. In fact, without being overly simplistic, a clear understanding of these verses in the mouth of God's Servant + Our Savior would go a long way to helping everyone understand the real danger to our bodies and souls. As important as it is to understand the danger, the genuine comfort and power for our lives comes from seeing the LORD's Solution. On this night when we celebrate Christ's institution of His Holy Supper, it's especially comforting to see how with such intensity and power **God's Servant Is Mighty to Save**.

‡ stained in blood (vv.1-3)

Water, bread and wine are present wherever humans live – ancient or modern. It's one of the great wonders of Christ's holy sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper that our gracious God would take such ordinary things and give them extraordinary power by connecting to them His Word of promise and forgiveness. The older I get the more I appreciate the simple beauty of God's grace in the sacraments.

It wasn't until 1869, right after the Civil War, that Dr. Thomas Bramwell Welch launched the processed fruit juice industry. He successfully pasteurized Concord grape juice to produce an "unfermented sacramental wine" for his fellow church parishioners in Vineland, New Jersey. <sup>2</sup> Up until then the "fruit of the vine" could only be used in fermented form down through the ages of the ancient Israelites – from 1500 B.C. and the Exodus with Moses until Jesus *"took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to [His disciples], saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* (Matthew 26:27f; Luke 22:20 NIV84)

Part of making wine then and now in some parts of the world, even sometimes as a tourist attraction, is treading or stomping the grapes. This gets the juice flowing which is then collected for making the wine. Bare feet and legs get covered with grape juice, sometimes spattering all the way up on the clothing of the grape stompers. That's what raised the question for the prophet Isaiah when he saw a strange sight, someone coming from the east, dressed in royal robes, but...listen:

The prophet Isaiah asked: *"Who is this coming from Edom, with bright red garments? Who is this coming from Bozrah, gloriously majestic in his robes, marching out with great strength?"* <sup>3</sup> *Edom* means "red," the nation named after Jacob's brother Esau. The Edomites hated Israel like so many of her neighbors today. They even stood and cheered years later when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the LORD's temple. Here *Edom* symbolizes all the stubborn enemies of God who refuse to accept His blessings through His people. *Bozrah* was one of their fortified cities which certainly reminds us of all the weapons the enemies of the God of the Bible are still using today. Somehow this Champion in

<sup>1</sup> Midweek Lenten Series: *God's Servant + Our Savior* at New Life Evangelical Lutheran, Shoreview, Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.welchs.com/about-us/our-story/our-history>

<sup>3</sup> The words of this sermon text are part of my draft review for a translation project. [M.C. 2/24/2016]

majestic robes, marching strong in His own power makes the prophet ask who He is. Answer: ***“I am speaking in righteousness, I am mighty to save.”*** See the Righteous One who comes to save?

Another question from the LORD’s prophet: ***“Why is your clothing so red, your garments like someone stomping grapes in a winepress?”*** Anyone today would expect an answer about harvest time and happy parties of friends stomping grapes with more wine tasting parties to come.

But that’s not the Servant’s response: ***“I tread the winepress alone, and from the peoples there was no one with me. So I will stomp them in my anger, and I will trample them in my wrath, and their blood will splatter on my garments. I will stain all my clothing.”*** It’s not wine that has stained the Servant’s clothing. It’s the blood of His enemies. That’s a revolting picture all by itself.

#### ‡ **redeeming in vengeance (v.4)**

It doesn’t get any better in our next verse, or does it? ***“For the day for vengeance is in my heart, and the year for my redemption is coming.”*** Who are the enemies of God who suffer His **vengeance**?

Among God’s people Isaiah had been pointing out the self-righteous ones who thought they could earn God’s favor by fasting. But their worship was sadly flawed by their greed and insincerity. They went through the motions but did not put their heart into their offerings. They looked like really religious people, but their religion did not please God because they were busy judging others instead of confessing their own sins as God sees sin. So they failed to trust His forgiveness in faith. Human iniquity separates us from God and turns off the prayer line to His heart. And the seriousness of this separation was seen in centuries of innocent Passover lambs, raised like pets as we would say, then slaughtered in order to paint the lamb’s blood on the doorposts. That blood saved the Israelites from death in Egypt but it also pointed to something few people today understand: ***“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*** (Hebrews 9:22 NIV84) God’s **vengeance** on us for our sins is all we could see except for this: ***“The year for my redemption is coming.”*** We have hope remembering God’s Servant was also the Kinsman-Redeemer He provided for His people to protect their place in His heavenly Promised Land.

#### ‡ **working salvation alone (vv.5-6)**

No one could help Him with this: ***“I looked intently but there was no helper. I am appalled, shocked that there is no one to lean on. So my own arm delivered me, and my wrath supported me.”*** Jesus realized from eternity as He looked at the sorry state of fallen man that there would be no one for Him *to lean on*, no one to understand and *uphold* Him. This proved true of His mother and stepfather, brothers and sisters, townsfolk in Nazareth, Jewish religious leaders, even His Twelve chosen disciples. Despite all His warnings, they still abandoned Him and ran away. Never before or since has so much hung on one person – all our guilt and with it the eternal welfare of the whole human race.

It is no accident that the events of that first Command (Maundy) Thursday would find our Lord Jesus alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. *Gethsemane* means, “wine press,” you know? Some see His anguish there and find only loss and suffering and pain. But in fact Jesus’ bloody sweat in anticipation of the cross meant He was already battling for our salvation. Before the crown of thorns was pressed into His innocent head, before the beating, spitting, scourging, before the nails were driven through His hands and feet, before the spear pierced His wounded side, Jesus was trampling the grapes of God’s wrath against our stubborn, self chosen ways. The LORD’s Servant was proving Himself to be the LORD our righteousness by His humble prayer to the heavenly Father: “Not my will, but yours be done.”

All this in order to give us God’s unconditional love and forgiveness, to show our sins have already suffered God’s wrath with Jesus as our Substitute. Now God’s wrath is on our side to punish the enemies of God’s people in His own time and way. Until then with Isaiah: ***“I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us— yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.”*** (63:7 NIV84) His Holy Supper seals the deal, His new covenant of pure grace. Amen.