

The Suffering Servant in Our Place

Isaiah 53.5

Sermon

For over a yr our cong has made a study of this prophecy written by Isa c. 2700 yrs ago, & as we've meditated on it, we've learned why many scholars refer to it as 5th gospel bc of its rev of the M. Beg in Sept as we moved into 2nd half of Isa's writing, we've taken our communion Suns (typically 1st Sun of each month) to consider in great detail what might be most imp rev of M in OT: Isa 53 (p. 511). 4th Serv Song: 1st (42), 2nd (next Sun, 49), 3rd (50). Actually begins in 52.13 & runs through to end of 53rd. Fifteen vss divided into five stanzas of three vss each. Today we come to apex of song, middle vs of middle stanza, Isa 53.5. Begin reading w start of song. [Read text.]

1st readers of this 4th Serv Song no doubt puzzled by what it meant. On face of it, song about coming deliverer/G's mighty rescue plan/M. But 1st stanza (52.13–15) suggests Serv will suffer: *appearance disfigured, form marred*. 2nd stanza (53.1–3) goes farther (*despised, rejected, man of suffering, pain*), phys weakness & illness. 3rd stanza begins to make sense of Serv's suffering. In v. 4 Serv's torment not his own, in fact was ours: *took up our pain, bore our suffering*. Serv is to suffer w his peo. Ergo Serv must not be nat of Isr as a whole, but one from nat of Isr. But Isa says that when we see Serv suffer, we interp his suffering as being the result of divine judgment: *punished by G*. Serv suffers w his peo, but his own peo reject him as obj of divine wrath. When you get to v. 5, however, something has changed. Same speakers, but now the "we" confess something new. Ergo 1st word: *but*. "In contrast to our earlier, flawed interp, we now see what is so: *pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities*." Stanzas 1 & 2: Serv suffers. v. 4: Serv suffers w his peo. v. 5: Serv suffers for his peo. What Isa presents is **fact** of substitution. **Oswalt**: "He does not suffer merely as a result of the sins of the peo, but in the place of the peo. He suffers for them" (2.385).

Controversial: variety of **objections** raised against idea of substitution.
Theo/phil: “substitution an immoral construct.” Even professedly Xian: “divine child abuse.” Ergo other theories of atonement: moral example/influence of love, martyr, Christus Victor. But these theories make sense only if substitution in play. How does the M’s death prove he’s Victor? Only in the sense that he has conquered our greatest enemies, sin & death. For what great cause did the M die as a martyr? None, except for the cause of rescuing sinners & putting full radiance of G’s glory on display. In what sense does the M’s death show love? Only in the sense that his dying gives us life. Other theories insufficient on their own, & insufficient precisely bc theo/phil grounds underneath it are weak, i.e., obj that substitution an immoral construct. In fact not so at all, but a notion we recog & salute. In fact 2x a yr our nation sets aside holidays to celebrate the very idea of substitution, & don’t mean Xmas & Easter. I refer, of course, to Vet Day & Mem Day. On Vet Day we recog those, like my father & K’s father, who gave up some of their best yrs & risked health & life to serve our country. & on Mem Day we recog those who didn’t come home from war, but who died to win or secure our freedom. Our nat has many flaws to be sure, but what we do have—right of self-governance, freedom of religion/press/speech/assembly—what we do have is ours bc of death of those brave women & men who made ult sacrifice to provide it. Ill of Amazon’s *Man in the High Castle*: startling title sequence, haunting singing of “Edelweiss,” paratroopers landing near Mt Rushmore, Nazis taking NYC. Why are we dealing w probs of EU right now instead of 3rd Reich? Bc peo died to win that freedom. Such substitution not immoral, but itself supreme act of love. So the M’s death: not divine child abuse, but supreme act of self-sacr.

2nd obj. **Existential**: not often raised verbally, but I suspect it comes to mind more often than we may admit. Ok to admit principle of substitution: soldiers died for our country, or more generically soldiers died for our freedom, or perhaps even more specifically soldiers died for us. But this vs doesn’t say simply that the Serv died for his peo or

the Serv died out of love, or even that the Serv died for us. Read text again: *pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities*. Ergo 2nd obj: “not so bad that I need this to rescue me.” *transgressions*: rebellious deeds. *iniquities*: “bentness or pervertedness of human nature, result of the fall & the ever-flowing fount of sin” (Motyer, 430). Let’s face it: most of us—& by most of us, I mean all of us much of the time—don’t think of our sin that way. Tend to think “we’re decent peo, good peo. Haven’t killed anyone, robbed a bank, committed adultery. Sure, we make mistakes, nobody’s perfect. But aren’t these words a little harsh?” Ill of Rico Tice’s book we gave away this Xmas, *A Very Diff Xmas*: movie made about your life, entitled: *Your Life: A Decent Pers*. “As you put it on & watch, there’s so much there that you’re pleased w. You have been a good child, or spouse, or parent. You have worked hard. You have been kind. You have sacrificed your own comfort to help someone else. There is much to be pleased w, much that you could sit & watch alongside anyone & feel relaxed & confident about. But then as you watch, you see so much that, quite frankly, you’re ashamed of. The peo you’ve made cry. The peo you’ve trodden on to get to where you are. The peo you’ve hurt—& some of them were peo you loved. The peo you could have helped but never even noticed. The selfishness. The anger. The impatience. The lust. All the things that you are so grateful that no one except you knows about” (31–2). Why this mixture of beauty & brokenness? “We are made in G’s image—made to be like G, capable of great good—but we’re also peo who are capable of great wrongs bc we want to be G—& so we want to remake G in our own image, to fit in w our plans & preferences. The heart of the prob is the prob of our hearts. Fundamentally, we were made to say to G, ‘Your will be done.’ . . . Instead, we say, ‘My will be done’” (33). See what Isa is doing by using these two terms? Confronting another idol. Already destroyed idol of success (52.13–15), idol of appearance (53.1–2), idol of power (53.3), idol of our own sagacity (53.4). Now prophet takes aim at another idol: the idol of self-righteousness. “I may do bad things, but I’m not that bad.” & G says, “Look at your heart & be honest.”

& it's only when you acknowledge that those two words describe you, only when you admit that your ways are rebellious bc your very nature is bent away from G, only when you admit that your decency is a sham that you find hope. IOW, it's only when we recog the bad news about ourselves that we can hear the good news about the Serv. Expressed four ways. While our rebellion is real, it was for our *transgressions* that the Serv was *pierced*. Refers to pierced through w a fatal result. Heb scholar F Delitzsch: "it is the strongest term for violent & excruciating death" in Heb lang (qtd. in [Oswalt](#), 2.387). & yes our nature really is bent, but it was for our *iniquities* that the Serv was *crushed*. [Motyer](#): "used of peo being trampled to death" (430). Our *punishment*, the punishment we deserved bc of our sin, fell instead on him. & thus the Serv was *wounded*. Older trans: "stripe," a stroke w a rod or whip. Just like a POW who is wounded in battle, tormented by enemy, & dies a violent death, all for the sake of his peo, so the Serv was violently wounded, tormented in his final hours, & died a violent death, all for the sake of his peo.

& you don't have to wonder who that Serv is: all you need to do is read the accounts of the crucifixion to know that this Serv is none other than our LJX. & in these words we see why it is J died on that cross, what it all means. For in the cross we see **transfer** of substitution. **Negative** side of substitution: Serv suffered violent death bc of his peo's sin, his wounds for our sin. In his body he absorbed punishment we should have rec'd bc of our rebellion. At the cross he drank the full cup of G's wrath that should have been ours. J was *pierced for our transgressions*, *crushed for our iniquities*. But that's not all: a **positive** side too. Not only does the Serv suffer a violent death bc of our sin, the Serv suffers a violent death in order to make us whole. Not only are his wounds for our sin, his wounds also for our healing. Punishment he absorbed was *punishment that brought us peace*: shalom, not just objective peace (cessation of hostilities) or subjective peace (warm fuzzy feeling) but wholeness, "comprising pers fulfilment [*sic*], harmonious society & a

secure relat w G” (Motyer, 431). & wounds he endured are means by which we are healed. Lit. “by his wounds, there is healing for us.”

Oswalt: “[The Serv] is not merely participating in [his peo’s] suffering, he is bearing it away for them so that they may not labor under its effects anymore. He took the punishment that made it poss for us to have well-being, & he has taken the infected welts so that ours could be healed” (2.388).

Which brings us to one final q: who is the “we”? Or, to put it another way, can I get in on this? Is this confession of v. 5 limited to Isa & other prophets in Jeru 2700 yrs ago? limited to nat of Isr? limited to relig peo? Thankfully no (**recognition**). The “we” includes all who recog that their assumption of innocence & decency was wrong, that they are too broken to fix themselves, that they need a Savior. & the good news of this psg is that that Savior has come & his name is J.

It’s what we celebrate at this Table, that we cannot save ourselves but we need Another. Just like we cannot give ourselves phys life but are entirely dependent on food & drink, so we cannot give ourselves spir life but are entirely dependent on the Bread of life & the living Water, our LJX. These wafers of bread & these little cups of juice do not rescue you, but they are here to remind you of the One who does. Come, for all has been prepared. There is healing for you in J.