

The Servant Who Died in Our Place: Isaiah 53

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If you've read the book by Charles Dicken's, *A Tale of Two Cities*, you remember the poignant scene at the end where Sydney Carton trades places with Charles Darnay. The two men are similar in appearance, and Sydney dresses himself like Charles and stealthily takes his place among those on their way to the guillotine. What an act of love and sacrifice. Charles goes free, and Sydney (in Charles' place) goes to his death.

That's what Jesus did for us. He made Himself to look like us, to become one of us. And then He took our place. He traded places with us. We go free, and He goes to the cross. Of course, this story ends differently, because death was not the end for Jesus. He rose again, as we'll talk about much more on Sunday. But we should stand in awe of His love manifested in His sacrifice and substitution for us.

On this Good Friday, as we meditate on the cross, I want to point out from our passage in Isaiah 53 four truths about Jesus' death. I want us to see that His death was substitutionary. It was voluntary. It was effective. And finally, that it happened according to the Scriptures. Last Sunday we focused on the first 3 stanzas of this Servant Song, 52:13-53:6. This evening we will look again at 53:4-6, and also the next stanza, verses 7-9. On Easter morning, then, we will study the final stanza.

SUBSTITUTIONARY

Jesus' death was substitutionary. At the heart of the Gospel is the truth that Jesus Christ became our substitute on the cross. That is what we saw last Sunday, especially in verses 4-6. Notice the pronouns that demonstrate the substitution of him for us. Verse 4: "Surely *he* has borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows." Verse 5: "But *he* was wounded for *our* transgressions; *he* was crushed for *our* iniquities; upon *him* was the chastisement that brought *us* peace, and with *his* stripes *we* are healed." And the end of verse 6: "the Lord has laid on *him* the iniquity of *us* all." Verse 8 also points to this truth: "he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people."

The abuse that Jesus Christ received was NOT because of anything He had done wrong. He was innocent. He was perfect. But He suffered these things in our place. He became our substitute. The imagery of the lamb puts this in the context of the

Old Testament sacrificial system. It reminds us of the Passover lamb, which was to be without blemish, and then killed and its blood put on the doorposts of the houses. And the Lord said, “when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13). Thus the lamb died in place of the people. Or we think further back to Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. The Lord stopped Abraham just before he was going to sacrifice his son, and then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in a thicket. And the text says that “Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering *instead of his son*” (Genesis 22:13). We see running through the Old Testament this theme of a sacrificial substitute. A lamb dying in the place of the people. A spotless lamb being sacrificed for the sins of the people. And then we come to the New Testament, and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and John the Baptist declares about Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). All these Old Testament sacrifices point to Jesus Christ. He is our substitute. He is the spotless Lamb who died in our place to atone for our sins.

VOLUNTARY

Look at verse 7: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” Jesus’ died voluntarily. He didn’t plead His innocence. He didn’t resist. We see this in His trials. Before Caiaphas, Jesus was silent (Matthew 26:62-63). Before Pilate, He did not defend Himself (Mark 15:4-5). Before Herod, He made no answer (Luke 23:9). Jesus could have defended Himself. He could have demonstrated that He had done nothing wrong. But He silently and willingly received this punishment on our behalf. Verse 9 states plainly that He was innocent: “he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

What an amazing Savior we have! He knew the pain and agony He was about to endure. And yet He silently and patiently and willingly subjected Himself to this punishment. He did this for us!

I also want to point out the interesting contrast between the two ways the sheep metaphor is used in these verses. In verse 6 we are compared to sheep in that we go astray. To put it more bluntly, we are the stupid sheep. We don’t know where to go, and so we wander off wherever our foolish desires lead us. On the other hand, in verse 7 the Servant is compared to a lamb and a sheep in that he is submissive and silent and innocent. He didn’t

open His mouth as He was led to the slaughter. He was silent before His shearers. He did not resist. So we see the contrast in these verses between the sinless Lamb and the wandering sheep He came to rescue.

I heard a bizarre story about sheep when I was in the Middle East last week. And then I looked it up on the internet and found the news story about it with some additional details. This was reported in Istanbul, Turkey in 2005. A large number of shepherds were eating their breakfast while their sheep were grazing together. One sheep wandered over a cliff and died. The next sheep followed, then another, and yet another, until nearly 1,500 sheep had gone over the cliff. How tragic. The really bizarre part of the story is that although 1,500 sheep walked off the cliff, only about 450 died. The rest of them had such a cushion they fell on to, that they survived. Still, the loss to these shepherding families was estimated to be about \$100,000.¹

The story shows us how stupid sheep are. Without the attentive guidance of the shepherd, the sheep will walk themselves off a cliff. And they'll play follow the leader, even if the leader is dangerously misguided.

That's why we desperately need the Good Shepherd to guide us. The Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. The One who suffered as an innocent Lamb in our place. Do you recognize that need in your life? I do! I need a Shepherd to guide me. I hate it that my emotions too often ride the waves of circumstances. I know that I'm fickle and need wise counsel and guidance. I'm so grateful that I can pray and ask Jesus to shepherd me.

EFFECTIVE

Jesus' death was substitutionary. It was voluntary. And thirdly, it was effective. We saw last Sunday in the opening words of this song. 52:13 says, "Behold, my servant shall act wisely." Or in other translations, "my servant shall prosper." But this refers to more than just wisdom or prosperity. It means the Servant will act wisely unto success. He will accomplish what He was sent to do. His life and death and resurrection will be effective.

And what does the text say that He came to do? Who did He intend to save through His substitutionary, voluntary death? In verse 8 He is "stricken for the transgression of *my people*." In

¹http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/offbeat/2005-07-08-sheep-suicide_x.htm

verses 4-6, the “us,” “we,” and “our” refer to God’s people, who have all gone astray and yet the sins of all of us were put on Jesus.

We conclude from this that Jesus died for His people, and therefore His people WILL be saved. His death is effective. He accomplished what He came to do. This is a glorious truth about Jesus’ death. He didn’t die just to offer salvation to whoever would accept it, and thus leaving it up to our fickle choice. On the contrary, His death assured the salvation of His elect. It’s not left up to chance. It’s not left to the fickle will of man.

ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus’ death was substitutionary, voluntary, effective. And finally, we must also see how His death happened according to the Scriptures. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3, “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures . . .” This encompasses everything that we see in Isaiah 53. This is a passage of Scripture written 700 years before Jesus came to earth, and it explains in such detail the nature of His suffering and death.

Several of these verses describe how He was humiliated and rejected. Verses 4-6 show how He substituted Himself for sinners. Verse 7 foretells his voluntary acceptance of this abuse. He opened not his mouth. He was silent. And those statements were fulfilled in his trials before Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod.

What a great Savior! And what a miraculous Book this is that tells us about our amazing Savior! I hope you don’t take this Book for granted. As I heard the story of Bible translators who were killed last week in the Middle East, it made me think about how precious the Bible is. Did you hear about this? There were some Bible translators last week in the Middle East who died at the hands of militants who apparently wanted to stop this Bible translating operation. The invaders destroyed their equipment, burned books, and killed 4 of the translators. The statement on the website of this organization says that “Two workers died of gunshot wounds. Two other workers laid on top of the lead translator—saved his life—and died deflecting bludgeoning blows from the radicals’ spent weapons.” And though they obviously grieve the deaths of these translators, the statement goes on to say, “We praise the Lord that He protected the computer hard drives containing the translation work for eight language projects.”² There are people giving their life’s work—and sometimes their very lives—so that unreached people groups can read the

²<http://blog.wycliffeassociates.org/prayer-watch-emergency-translators-martyred-in-middle-east-mar2016>

Scriptures in their own language. This Book is that precious, because it is a supernatural testimony to the Good News of what Jesus has done for us.

The other thing I want to point out this evening is in verse 9, “And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.” The NASB translates it, “His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death.”

This verse has been understood in different ways, but it seems to be making a contrast between being buried with the wicked, which is what would have been expected for someone who was crucified, and being buried with a rich man, which is what in fact happened. Jesus died with criminals, and it would be expected that his body would be discarded along with the bodies of the criminals. But something different happened. Everything had been disgraceful and shameful to this point. But his burial was not shameful. His grave was not with the wicked, but with a rich man. It’s interesting that it’s in the singular here, which makes the New Testament fulfillment all the more precise. After Jesus’ death, in Matthew 27:57-60 it says, “When it was evening, there came *a rich man* from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away.” The words of Isaiah 53:9 are fulfilled in the fact that Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, buried Jesus in a new tomb. We see in so many ways that the Bible is a supernatural book. We could read this passage of Scripture in Isaiah 53 and assume that it was written after Jesus’ death. But it was written centuries before, by the inspiration of God’s Spirit.

My hope this evening is that you will meditate on Jesus’ death, and that God will revive our hearts to see the wonder of the cross. Jesus’ death was **substitutionary**. He died in our place. It was **voluntary**. He died as the spotless Lamb of God, not deserving the punishment He received. His death was **effective**. He died for His sheep, and was successful in accomplishing what He was sent to do. And His death also happened precisely **according to the Scriptures**. Let’s be thankful this evening for the mighty salvation that was purchased for us on the cross. We serve a glorious Savior! One who humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross, and One who could not be held by the grave.