

Who Killed Jesus?, Isaiah 53:4-6

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Proposition: On Good Friday, God smote His own Son because of our sin.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we gather this evening, on a Friday night, because this is the preparation day — the day before the first Sabbath of Passover. Passover begins tonight. And it was at the same hour that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple courtyard that Jesus of Nazareth was sacrificed outside Jerusalem on Skull Hill. In other words, we commemorate the death of Jesus tonight because today is the anniversary of His death. I'm not insisting that Jesus was killed on the fifteenth of April in the year A.D. 33. Rather, He was killed on this day of the lunar calendar, which is going to vary in how it's represented on the solar calendar that we use. Thus, the point is not that Jesus died on April 15, but that He died on the day Passover began. That day is today. In other words, God brought Israel out of their bondage in Egypt on this day in 1446 B.C. He brought the human race out of bondage to sin on this day in A.D. 33. And now, we gather as His people and celebrate the deliverance from Egypt and the greater deliverance from sin, death, and Hell. We are going to look together at Isaiah 53, for it addresses the question of who killed Jesus. With God's help I will show you that it was your sin and my sin which killed Jesus, because God held Him responsible for our wicked capital crimes and offenses.

I. Who We Are

Isaiah begins by describing us. I deliberately use the words “we” and “us” in the sermon outline, because if you'll notice the structure of this passage, you see that it is bracketed at the beginning (52:13-15) and end (53:11-12) with speeches from Yahweh, while the long middle section is “our” confession — the confession of the remnant to whom the arm of Yahweh has been revealed. The “we” who's talking here, in other words, is us — believers, people who recognize Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh and see God's saving power at work in Him.

The “we” speaks as those to whom God’s arm has been revealed. “We” also confesses its own sin and complicity.

What’s the difference between an oracle in which we as the people of God speak in the first person, and an oracle in which God speaks about us in the third person? Well, let’s just reimagine these verses as being spoken by God about us, shall we?

Surely he has borne their griefs and carried their sorrows; yet they esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for their transgressions; he was crushed for their iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought them peace, and with his wounds they are healed.

6 All of them like sheep have gone astray; they have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of them all. (Isa 53:4-6 ESV)

What is the difference? It’s less personal. It’s God describing people, for sure — but as you and I hear it, we think it applies to other people. Some group of bad people is characterized by griefs and sorrows, by judgmentalism and wandering.

But to hear it the way Isaiah said it highlights that yes, it’s you and me, the readers, who can and must say these words. The question is not “Who was Isaiah’s audience 2600 years ago?” but “Who am I, who are we, today?”

A. A Grieving, Sorrowful People, v. 4a

Isaiah describes us first as a grieving, sorrowful people. We are like our Savior, who is described in the previous verse as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Why this emphasis on sadness as a key component of the Christian life? The answer is that the genuine servant of God is going to have a lot of sadness in this life. That’s why Jesus started His beatitudes by announcing God’s blessing on the poor in spirit and the mourners. That is us.

Christians are called to be joyful; see the book of Philippians. But that joy is not where we start out. Like the rest of the human race, we begin life in the estate of sin and misery. Where is there not misery in this world? Suffering, pain, harm, violence, depression, and wrong are everywhere.

The people of God are sorry because we are sinful. The people of God weep because we have done wrong. We, the people of God, should not expect to have a problem-free and sorrow-free existence. Rather, we should expect problems and pain. Jesus came to deal with the original cause of our grief and sorrow, which is the sin in our hearts that makes this world rotten and has earned God’s curse upon it.

Good Friday is a good day, but it’s supposed to be a hard day. Today, of all days, we should meditate on the death of the Son of God, and we should be grieved and sorrowful. It’s not a day for bouncy music and sugary feasts. It’s a day for properly thinking about what Jesus underwent, and why.

B. A Judgmental, Self-Righteous People, v. 4b

But though we all have difficulties and sorrows in our lives, I think that the second part of this verse likely resonates more deeply with us rich Westerners than the first part does. Here, we the people of God confess that we are judgmental, self-righteous people. This is one of the hazards

of being well-off in worldly terms. We start to think we deserve it. We start to think that wealth and poverty are moral rather than financial categories, and we all-too-easily despise those with less and imagine that they are less deserving and less upright. The Biblical insistence that the poor of this world are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom is something we like to forget. Of course the rich will inherit the earth; we are luxuriating in the favor of God in our warm houses and at our laden tables, on our vacations to the Caribbean and hurtling down the road in our new cars. As we do that, we tend to start thinking that those who aren't like us, who are sick, impoverished, ugly, and so on are under God's disfavor. After all, our material abundance is surely a sign of His favor, and therefore the opposite must be a sign of His disfavor. Right? Wrong, says Isaiah. We are not only miserable people; we are hypocritical and judgmental. We forget about our misery, look over at the suffering Servant, and decide that there at last is someone whom God has rightly struck. The homeless are homeless because they are so obstinate and ungrateful and lazy. The poor are poor because they insist on spending their money foolishly. The sick are sick because they didn't eat right and exercise religiously like we do. And Jesus of Nazareth is hanging on a cross because He was too stupid to understand that He was really making the establishment angry.

Brothers and sisters, Isaiah 53:4 does not present a very flattering picture, even if it is us saying it about ourselves. As you know, it's nicer to confess your inadequacies than to have someone else summarize them to you. But it's nicest of all not to have any inadequacies.

Well, our inadequacies are legion. Even we, those who recognize the Arm of the Lord in the person of Jesus Christ, all too often lapse into this worldly way of thinking — not necessarily about Jesus Himself, but certainly about our role as His servants. Our Master went to the cross; we expect to go to the country club. He was despised and rejected; we anticipate being feted and welcomed, or at least allowed to do our own thing in peace.

Brothers and sisters, again, not a flattering portrait; not exactly the confessions of up-and-coming, righteous people.

II. What God's Servant Underwent for Us, v. 5

But Isaiah moves on from our confession of pride and misery (notice how those two things go together; humility is happy!) to further confession regarding what happened to God's Servant and what effect that had on us. This is deliberate. Verse 5 will not fit into an outline under the heading "What Jesus Suffered" or "What We Receive" because the verse is inescapably about relating two things — what happened to Jesus on Good Friday, and what effect that suffering continues to have on us. This, brothers and sisters, is the Christian proclamation in a nutshell. We don't just believe that Jesus died. We believe that He died *for us*. Both parts of that statement are incredibly important — so important that they are each repeated four times here in Isaiah 53:5.

A. He Got Stabbed Because We Violated the Boundaries

The first way it's stated is this: Jesus was wounded, stabbed in the hands and feet with nails, in the head with thorns, in the side with a spear. His body was breached. His skin and flesh were pierced.

Have you ever been stabbed? Oh, all of us have suffered small cuts and been stabbed by tiny splinters, slivers, pieces of glass, and so on. But have you ever had someone deliberately take a big spear and slam it into your side? Take a knife and shove it in your ribs? I know one of us has been shot in the line of duty, on at least two occasions. But in general, we have no concept of what it feels like to get stabbed. But brothers and sisters, Jesus, God's servant, was wounded for you and me. He was wounded in five different places, counting the crown of thorns as one.

The word "transgressions" specifically speaks to the act of violating the boundaries, the act of crossing the line. Is there a relationship between what we did, in going outside the moral boundaries God drew for us from the beginning, and what happened to Jesus, the very boundaries of whose body were breached by steel nails and wooden thorns? It seems hard to say there isn't. Your sin was the reason that Jesus got stabbed in five different places.

B. He Got Crushed Because We Were Bent

Isaiah puts it a different way in the second poetic line here. The people of God confess now that Jesus was crushed. In the seventeenth century, this was actually a judicial sentence issued by some courts in the American colonies. You could have heavy wooden bridge planks laid over your body, with more and more weight stacked on top until you were crushed to death. Killing by crushing is most frequently associated with blast waves and falling rubble these days. But again, what form of sin is this related to? It's related to us being crooked or bent. We did not walk the straight and narrow; we were bent, twisted, messed up. That is what iniquity means.

You can imagine an aluminum can being crushed out of its original shape. I've seen several dried-up frog carcasses on roadways. They are flattened, the life crushed right out of them. Crushing is the most popular way to kill spiders.

But frogs and spiders are one thing; think instead, brothers and sisters, of the force that would be necessary to crush the Son of God. That is the force that's in view here. That is the level of pain poured out on Him. The same force that bent us away from the true and right — the force of sin — was poured out on Him, and it crushed Him. It makes us say, 'Well then, we couldn't possibly have done otherwise. The force of sin is so powerful that I had no choice but to be bent.' That's not true, brothers and sisters. The human race as a whole, represented really and covenantally in Adam, had a free choice. We chose bentness. We abandoned the upright, the straight, the perfect. We chose this. And the Son of God chose to be subject to the bending and smashing force of sin in our place.

C. He Got Corrected So We Could Have Peace

Isaiah adds a third way of saying it: Jesus was corrected, chastised, disciplined severely. He was punished by God Himself for our sins. Our sin demanded punishment. It stank to high Heaven. And God did punish it — just not in us. He punished someone else in our place. But now, instead of relating the punishment Jesus suffered to its cause, which was our sin, Isaiah relates the punishment Jesus suffered to its effect on our sin. How did being punished by God affect us? It brought us peace. Peace is the union of the appetite's inclinations; it is internal and external unity. When you want the same thing as the people around you, you are at peace. If you want to

be left alone and they want to leave you alone, there is peace. If you want to go to morning worship and they want to go to morning worship, there is peace.

Well, God wanted us to obey Him, and we did not want to obey Him. There was no peace between Him and us. But God punished our disobedience — but He punished His Son for it, thus making peace. When the fruits of the punishment Christ suffered are applied to us, we are at peace. He wants us to serve Him, and we want to serve Him.

How did that chastisement bring us peace? God could be reconciled to us. He could drop our sins, no longer holding them against us. Simultaneously, we could be reconciled to God. We did not have to regard Him any more as someone on the outs with us, someone offended with us. Because He took the step to make everything right, we could regard Him as a friend. Indeed, the death of Jesus not only cleanses our guilt, but even, in principle and eventually in practice, cleanses the sin right out of us. It all happened through His death; His chastisement purchased peace between His Father and us.

D. He Got Whipped So We Could Be Healed

Isaiah says it one more way: Jesus got whipped so we could be healed. Now, Isaiah is not suggesting that Jesus really only needed to be whipped and the rest would be OK. He is telling us that, as part of the whole complex of His suffering and death, there is a fittingness or parallel between Jesus getting wounded by the whip and us getting healed through those wounds. God loves paradox. And this is a mighty paradox: Wounds heal. The ripped-open areas on Jesus' back, called "stripes" because they are red lines on a brown field, are the price of reconciliation between God and us. And God paid that price in the person of His Son.

Brothers and sisters, that is astonishing. That is the core of our faith. That is why we are here tonight.

III. Why God's Servant Got Killed, v. 6

Why did Jesus die? There are two causes of His death, aside from His own relinquishing of His life that was the efficient cause of His death.

A. We Stopped Following God's Way, v. 6a

The first cause of Jesus' death is our sin. God made us to walk in His ways, to follow Him. And we just wandered off like sheep. Have you ever left the gate open and seen where the sheep will go? They won't all stay in the pen. And in the same way, if you open the gates and allow human beings to just do what they want they will all wander off the straight and narrow. They won't stay on the path to heaven. They won't live within the boundaries of the law. We all have done it. We are all miserable and sorrowful, proud and judgmental.

B. Yahweh Made His Servant Responsible, v. 6b

But here is the bottom line: Yahweh made His Servant responsible for that. The way we wandered right past the boundary lines? God held Jesus responsible, and Jesus took perfect responsibility for us, letting us off the hook. As Motyer points out in his commentary on these verses, "We all" at the beginning of the verse is perfectly matched by "us all" at the end.

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords because authority flows to those who take responsibility, and Jesus took the ultimate responsibility. He agreed to be on the hook for sin,

even though it wasn't His fault. He was not fired, though, as if firing the responsible person solves the issue. No. He actually fixed the issue. He dealt with sin, absorbing all of its killing power into Himself, being killed by it, and then rising from the dead and conquering it. Sin is beaten because Jesus took responsibility.

How? The Father transferred all the responsibility to Him. The LORD laid it on Him. How did He do that? We don't know. But He did it. He took the sin of the human race, of His elect, of "us," and laid it on His Son, who carried it away and destroyed it.

That happened on Good Friday. Your sin killed Jesus because God took the onus off you and put it on Him. Worship Him. Live the peace with God that He bought for you. Seek the healing that He has for you. He died to make it happen. Amen.