

Stricken for His People: Isaiah 53:4-9
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As Christians, the cross of Christ is so much more than a decoration on a wall or a piece of jewelry that you might wear around your neck. It was on a cross that our Savior died. He died an excruciating and bloody death. The cross is not a pretty thing in that sense. It is gory and disgusting and shameful. And yet the glory of the cross is that the Suffering Servant is also the exalted One. He is high and lifted up. The One who “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,” is the One who God therefore “has highly exalted” and has “bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:8-9). There is humiliation (blood and gore and shame) and there is also exaltation. And we see both of these in Isaiah 52-53. He humbled Himself to die for His people, and in that humiliation there is great glory. This is why we praise Him. This is why we honor Him. This is why He is high and lifted up.

On this Good Friday, as we meditate on the cross, I want to point out from this 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.

If it wasn’t for His sacrificial death in our place, then we would be on that cross. And we would be there forever. No one else could die on a cross and atone for sins like Jesus did. Jesus could bear the full penalty for sin in a finite amount of time, only because He is the infinite, perfect, Son of God. This would be impossible for any other human being. Since we are finite and sinful human beings, we would require an eternity of punishment to satisfy God’s justice. That’s how great Jesus’ substitutionary death is. It saves us from an eternity of punishment, and it gives us the gift of eternal life with Him. Christ died in our place. His death was substitutionary.

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!

Jesus' death was voluntary. We also see in this truth the cooperation of the Father and the Son in redemption. The Son voluntarily offered Himself as our substitute, and the Father laid on him the iniquity of us all (v. 6). Do you see how the Father and the Son cooperated in this mission to be just and also to justify sinners? The cost was great to both of them. The relational separation was agonizing. The Son had to bear the penalty for our sin, which meant bearing His Father's wrath. He had always received nothing but His Father's approval and delight. But now He would be forsaken and punished. He would cry out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). And for God the Father, it was the agony of watching His beloved Son suffer. And the pain of being the One to inflict that suffering. But the Father and the Son cooperated in this glorious plan to redeem the wandering sheep. The Father put our sin on His Son, and crushed Him (v. 10). And out of that intense pain comes our salvation. For all who cling to this Savior, this sacrificial Lamb, our sins are counted as His and His righteousness counted as ours.

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.

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 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. In the New Testament this truth is seen so vividly in Jesus' words in John 10, where again we're referred to as sheep. But in this case Jesus is the shepherd. He says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep" (vv. 14-15). This is a glorious truth about Jesus' death. He didn't die just to offer salvation to whoever would accept it. 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.

Derek Thomas writes this: "Indeed, it is inconceivable—here in Isaiah 53, or elsewhere in the biblical revelation—to sustain an understanding of the redemptive process which in some way is rendered totally ineffective by the refusal of some to accept it" (*God Delivers*, 340). In other words, God's plan of redemption doesn't depend on whether or not we choose to accept it. If we looked at God's work of redemption from a man-centered perspective, then we would see it in terms of a gift that God merely makes available, and the rest depends entirely on us. But that's not what we see in the Bible. Jesus didn't die just to make salvation a possibility for us. His death is effective in accomplishing salvation for His sheep. He didn't just purchase the possibility of salvation that would then be applied if someone believes. It's more than that. It has to be more than that, because apart from His grace none of us would believe. He made our salvation sure by purchasing even our regeneration. He gives to His sheep new hearts that then respond to Him in faith and love and delight. This is how Jesus' death is effective. He died for His sheep, and His sheep will hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:3-4).

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.

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. So 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.