

The Servant's Burden-Bearing Love

Isaiah 53:4-6

Halifax: 9 January 2011

Introduction

We have taken a two week hiatus from our study of Isaiah.

- One of the reasons I did this was because so many of you were away for the holidays—and we are at the very heart of Isaiah's prophecy.
- All along, Isaiah has been charging God's people with the reality of their sin and its consequences.
 - In Isaiah 6, He includes himself as a fellow-sinner, calling himself a man of unclean lips who dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips.
 - He recognises that he is completely undone before the holy God whose glory fills the temple—and all heaven and earth!
 - He feels the burden of the curse that has come upon all mankind because of sin.
 - He says, "Woe is me, for I am undone!"
 - He is ruined, destroyed, crushed because of His guilt.
- But all along, as Isaiah denounces Judah and Jerusalem for all their sins,
 - He also presents words of hope and consolation...
 - that there is cleansing and hope of restoration through the One that he calls:
 - the Branch,
 - Emmanuel (which means God with us)
 - The Son who is given to us and upon whose shoulder the government will rest,
 - The One whose name will be called, Wonderful, counsellor, everlasting father, prince of peace.
 - He tells us that He is the one who is anointed with Spirit,
 - He calls Him the Banner that is lifted up,
 - And in Isaiah 42, he began to call Him "the Servant of the LORD."
 - He describes Him as the only one who is righteous.
 - He tells us that He will not give up until He has brought righteousness and peace to God's people.
 - And now, in this great passage that we read today, Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12,

- He reveals to us exactly what the Servant is going to do to bring us true righteousness and peace!
- This passage is so clear that it makes those who resist God's salvation squirm.
 - There are all sorts of attempts by unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Christians to try to reject what is so clearly taught here.
 - Pages and pages have been written with hundreds of different attempts to dodge what is clearly taught here,
 - but the very fact that none of them agree ought to make them see how futile such attempts are.
 - They are just like the chief priests and scribes at Jesus trial who could not find two witnesses to agree in their charges.
- But for our part, we simply want to look at our Lord Jesus who is so obviously presented to us in this remarkable passage!
 - Attempts to deny that it is about Him makes some of the most intelligent men in all the world look like idiots!
 - It becomes so obvious that the problem is not with the content of the text, but with stubborn depraved hearts that refuse to accept what is so clearly set forth here about our dear Saviour.
 - I hope that none of you who hear this message will try to resist the truth...
 - It is not at all something that will harm you if you embrace it.
 - It is that which will reconcile you to God if you will accept it.
 - It is that which will give you true righteousness and peace forever and rescue you from the curse of sin.

As this great passage opens, we saw in our first sermon that in the first three verses, the Servant is presented as One who deals prudently.

- These three verses form an introductory summary of the entire passage.
 - They show us that even though the path that the Servant takes *looks* like a path of folly that leads to ruin,
 - It turns out to be the path that leads to highest exaltation for Him and to the sprinkling or cleansing of many nations from sin!
- The next three verses, verses 1-3 of chapter 53, show us how He laid aside His glory and made Himself of no reputation in the carrying out of His mission.
 - For this reason, He was despised and rejected and not esteemed by His own people—could this be the Messiah?
 - How could it be that He should be brought to such grief if He was the Messiah?

- That was what we looked at in the second sermon.

And now, today, as we come to the very heart of this great passage,

- we are told how it was that such affliction fell upon Him.
 - It was because He bore the curse of His people's sins!
 - The curse that had been brought upon them fell upon Him!
 - He became a substitute, the ultimate bearer of the burdens of others!
 - He is the one who steps forward when the whole church was weighed down with the burden of sin and takes that burden all upon Himself!
 - He comes and takes His place as the head of God's covenant people whose sins would have sunk them into the lowest Hell,
 - and He takes all those sins upon Himself—I mean the penalty of them—and removes them from His people forever!
- Oh it is a great thing!
 - You know what it is like to have someone who loves you enough to bear your burdens!
 - When someone sacrifices to give to you!
 - It is such a beautiful thing and most of us have experienced it.
 - When I was studying this passage a couple of weeks ago, I had two examples of such burden-bearing love in one day.
 - The first one was from Pastor Howard Curry in New Jersey.
 - As many of you know, my daughter Emily was stranded in New Jersey when her passport was stolen.
 - She needed help, so I called some of the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches in New Jersey to ask if they had anyone who lived near the airport that could help her out.
 - Pastor Curry was already ready for bed, on vacation with his wife, but he got dressed went out himself to the airport to bring Emily to his house for the night...
 - That was what I was looking for was someone to take her in for the night, but he went way beyond that...
 - He volunteered to drive her all the way to Philadelphia the next day to get a new Passport—two hours away with another two hours there and another two hours back to the airport.
 - He loaned us the money for all the fees—and he was a complete stranger to us!
 - Mary and Emily and I were overwhelmed with this man's kindness who took it upon himself to bear our burdens.
 - I was going to drive down to get her as she could not fly without a passport, but he gave of his time to help her.

- It was not his burdens, but he took it as his own!
- And if that were not enough, it was on the very same day—as I was studying about Jesus bearing our burdens right here in Isaiah 53:4-6,
 - that some of you came over to our house for your daughters to make gingerbread houses.
 - We were looking at expenses of \$500 on account of the stolen passport.
 - You did not know about this expense, but some of you knew about other expenses we had incurred this fall...
 - And on that very day, you brought us a very generous offering that you had collected for us—in addition to the generous salary you provide for us each month.
 - You were sacrificing for us at this expensive time of year, bearing our burden!
 - It was not your burden, but you took it as your own.
 - It was lifted from us and taken up by you!
 - We were so blessed to be loved by you!

How well these burden-bearing examples illustrate the burden-bearing of our Lord Jesus!

- Not that they compare in magnitude to the infinite burden He bore for us...
 - But that they compare in kind—the same spirit of love is in them!
 - With warm hearts, let us look more closely at this marvellous text (Isa 53:4-6) about our burden-bearing Lord.

I. First of all, I want you to see that the burden He bore was truly *our* burden.

- It was not His, it was ours.

A. Isaiah states it very plainly in verse 4:

- Isa 53:4: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”

1. But what are these griefs and sorrows?

a. First, let’s look at the words themselves.

- The word translated *griefs* refers to sickness or faintness from either injury of disease.
- And the word translated *sorrows* ordinarily refers to mental anguish from troubles and difficulties we experience.
- Together, these two words pretty much include all the various afflictions that are borne by the human race.
 - “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows”—all of our afflictions.

- b. In the New Testament Matthew quotes this verse and tells us that it was fulfilled by Jesus when He healed people and cast out demons.
 - In Matthew 8:16-17, after Jesus had healed Peter's mother, it says:
 - Matt 8:16-17: When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."
 - So you see that everything from deformities to demon possession is included here.
 - When Jesus came among the afflicted, their afflictions were taken away by Him.
2. But Isaiah makes it clear that these griefs and sorrows did not just evaporate.
- They were rather transferred from us to our Saviour.
 - This is not just implied, it is emphasised.
- a. First of all, by the verbs that are used—that they were *borne* by Him and *carried* by Him.
- The word *borne* means just that—
 - He became the actual bearer of them—
 - He did not make them disappear, but transferred them to Himself.
 - Instead of us having to bear the pain, He bore the pain!
 - And the word *carried* does not mean that He carried them off to the dump to dispose of them, but that He loaded them upon Himself.
 - They were added to His load.
 - Everything that is taken from us is transferred to Him.
 - It was as if whenever He healed someone, it was added to the load that He would have to bear on the cross...
 - I don't mean that there was necessarily a mathematical equivalency,
 - but that our LORD knew that all of the healings He did would cost Him—that in removing the curse from His people, it will all come back on Him.
- b. Secondly, Isaiah shows us the transfer of the load from us to Him by using the same nouns that He used in verse 3...
- the words "griefs and sorrows" were used in verse 3.
 - In verse 3, He had described Christ as a man of *sorrows* and acquainted with *grief*.

- Those are the same words we find in verse 4, only in reverse order—griefs and sorrows...
 - The Saviour had these sorrows and griefs and this made people doubt if He was the messiah...
 - But the truth is that He had them because He was the Messiah and so was bearing them for His people!
 - He was bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows!
- We had mistakenly thought they were His own...
 - He was not being punished by God for His own sins...
 - He was bearing the punishment for **our** sins.

TRANS> Okay, but now there is a question that cries out to us...

B. Why are these sorrows and afflictions said to be ours?

- Why did they belong to us to start with?
 - That's a question you hear all the time, isn't it?
 - Why are there birth defects and cancers and hurricanes and destroying fires and aides and plane crashes and disabilities and death?
 - Why is the human race afflicted with all these things griefs and sorrows?

1. Isaiah tells us that the sorrows and griefs that Christ bore were on account of our sin.

a. You can see this from verse 5...

- Isaiah 53:5: He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.
 - The word *for* that is used twice here is literally *from*—like this:
 - “He was wounded from our transgressions, He was bruised from our iniquities.”
 - The affliction came from transgression and iniquity.
 - *transgressions* (פֶּשַׁע) *peh shah*, refer to wilful rebellion as when one casts of allegiance and revolts as we do against God.
 - *iniquities* (עוֹנֵי) *aw-vone*, refer to perversity and depravity, the fact that sin is part of our very nature as fallen.
- The Servant of the LORD was guilty of neither transgression or iniquity.
 - He always obeyed the Father, even to the point of death—there was no rebellion in Him.
 - Sin was completely alien to His nature.
 - He is the only man of whom the scripture declares that He was without sin.
 - But His suffering came from our sins.

- b. This tells you that affliction originates from sin.
 - This is just what the scripture tells us elsewhere...
 - That our sorrows and griefs are the consequence of sin...
 - not the natural consequence, but the judicial consequence!
 - This is not a specific thing—that we have cancer because we committed a particular sin—
 - but it is rather that affliction is upon the whole human race because we are all sinners and transgressors.
 - Adam and Eve transgressed in the garden when they revolted against God’s authority by eating the forbidden fruit...
 - And right then and there, the Father came to them and charged them and sentenced them to death and suffering.
 - Before they rebelled, there was no death, no sorrow, no grief,
 - but through the one man’s transgression, death came upon all.
 - So now it is just a part of the way things are.
 - But no one can say that we do not deserve the afflictions that come upon us—we are all transgressors and sinners.
 - We suffer because we are sinners.
 - If we were not sinners, we would not suffer.
 - Isaiah is telling us in verse 4-5 that it was not because of His own sins that Jesus suffered...
 - Many thought that,
 - but it was because of our sins, our transgressions and our iniquities that He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
 - The wounding and bruising that He received was from our offenses.
 - That was the source of His grief and sorrow.
2. Isaiah makes it very clear that it was *our* sins that Jesus suffered for.
- By that, I mean the sins of what we call the invisible church—all of the elect people who are destined for heaven.
 - It was not the sins of those who never come to Christ for which He suffered—it was for *our* sins!
- a. He makes it clear that the whole invisible church—all the elect—put Jesus on the cross.
- 1) He says, “All we like sheep have gone astray.”

- Isaiah is not speaking here about the world per se, but the covenant people of God.
 - Of course those who are not even in covenant with God have gone astray—they do not even acknowledge the true God or serve Him.
 - But Isaiah says, “All we like sheep have gone astray.”
- Even though the Lord has called us to be His people and even though He has come to us with His promises and His grace and gathered us into His fold,
 - We have not been faithful to Him.
 - The whole mass of us are guilty of sinning against our gracious God who calls us to Himself.
 - We have come short of His glory.
 - We have not honoured Him.
 - We have cursed Him
 - We have misrepresented Him as His image bearers.
 - Our hearts are full of iniquity.

TRANS> There are no exceptions—it is the whole church. Isaiah includes himself when he says “All we.”

2) You need to see that you are not an exception either!

- Sometimes we like to get lost in the group and say the group has sinned, but Isaiah singles each of you when he says,
 - “we have turned every one to His own way!”
 - You are not just part of a naughty class room that has to stay after school—you as an individual have turned to your own way—
 - We have turned every one to his own way.
- What a comprehensive way this is to speak of our sin...
 - Who among you can say that you do not frequently turn to your own way!
 - You were made for the Lord, but you have not followed Him.
 - There are all the selfish words you have spoken—harsh words even to your own family.
 - There are all the opportunities to show love to others that you have neglected and all the needs that you have ignored.

- There is the ingratitude and the forgetfulness of the Lord and there is pride and the self-sufficiency.
- There are the lusts and there is the anger and the covetousness.
- There are all the times that you have cursed God and been discontent with Him and with what He has done.
 - All of this is your own way and not His way!

TRANS> And none of this is light!

b. It is because of this that your Saviour had to suffer as He did when He took your burden!

- The LORD has laid on Him—on Jesus the servant—the iniquity of us all.
 - The guilt of the entire church—all of us—has been put upon Him in order that He might bear it.
- The word *laid* is actually much stronger in the original.
 - It means to *strike with violence*.
 - Our sins hit upon Him with violence.
- What else could have caused this mighty Saviour who is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah to cry out in anguish and to sweat blood from His pores.
 - It fell upon Him with such violence that He was cut off from the Father on the cross.
 - The heavens above were darkened and He said, “My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me.”
 - Make no mistake, He was smitten of God and afflicted indeed!
 - But not for His own sins—
 - It was for the sins of His people—all the elect because all of us have gone astray!
- What a heavy, heavy burden was laid upon Him!
 - We cannot possibly understand the griefs and the sorrows that He bore for our sins...
 - Yes, we have a small taste of the misery of sin in this world with our sorrows and griefs—
 - but He bore the full weight of the curse with which we were sentenced—the curse that cuts us off from communion with God for all eternity.
 - We have yet to be entirely cut off from God as He was on the cross.

- He bore the entirety of that for the whole church!
- It all converged upon Him on the cross and sunk even Him into the grave—though He could not remain there!

TRANS> It was our griefs and our sorrows for our sins, but it was all put upon Him!

II. What a marvellous outcome there is for us!

A. It completely removes the burden from us—there is a total transference from us to Him of the grief and sorrow that sin brings.

1. John Calvin put it like this

- In ourselves, we are scattered, in Christ we are gathered together.
- By nature, we go astray, and are driven headlong to destruction; in Christ we find the course by which we are conducted to the harbour of salvation.
- Our sins are a heavy load, but they are laid on Christ by whom we are freed from the load.

2. But perhaps you are wondering how we can say that our burdens are completely taken away when believers who come to Christ are still often heavily afflicted with griefs and sorrows.

- If Jesus has taken all these and borne them for us, how is that we still have to bear them?
 - When He was on the earth, lepers were cleansed, the blind received sight, the lame walked, the dead were raised,
 - but after He was raised and ascended to heaven, all of these afflictions returned to us so that we are not much different than others.
- But you see, we are different!
 - All of the afflictions we bear in this world are, as I mentioned before, are only a foretaste of the wrath to come.
 - Not one of us has come close to experiencing the wrath that will come upon the wicked at the last day when the full wrath of God falls on them.
 - That wrath will remain upon them forever.
 - They will be brought to the place that Jesus called the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.
 - The burdens that He lifted during His earthly ministry were but tokens of the great burden that He came to bear for us—the everlasting curse!
 - These healings were signs to teach us that He is the one who came to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows in the most ultimate sense.

- He did not promise to remove all of these from us immediately, but rather at last day when He returns to receive us into glory.
 - He told us that until then, we would have to bear much affliction—
 - He even told us that we were to take up our cross and follow Him until the great day of His appearing.
 - As He was in the world, so must we be.
- But all along the way, we ought to be cheered by the great hope that we have on account of His suffering for us—His bearing of all our iniquities.
 - It takes away the sting from death, and the evil from all of our afflictions in this world because we know that they will not last.
 - We know, in fact, that they are part of the process by which God is preparing us for glory.

TRANS> See how Isaiah describes the benefits of Jesus’ work for us in verse 5.

B. He says, “The chastisement of our peace is upon Him.”

1. This does not speak of *chastisement* in the sense of that which improves our morals...
 - We still have that kind of chastisement...
 - You know, the kind that is properly brought upon children to improve them, to smarten them up and teach them a lesson.
 - Punishments are rendered to deter them from bad behaviour and discourage them from doing it again—
 - even to alert them and wake them up to the wrong that they have done.
 - That is the proper reason for chastening our children—to impart wisdom to them.
 - But that is not what is in view with this chastisement.
 - This chastisement involves Christ receiving punishment that would have otherwise fallen on us.
 - It is, as we have seen, His bearing the penalty of our sin.
 - In other words, the punishment that would have sunk us under eternal wrath and vengeance falls upon Christ instead of on us.
2. The result is that we who were under the wrath and curse of God now have peace with God!
 - We are no longer enemies!
 - This is the peace that Paul spoke about in Romans 5:1 when he said:
 - Rom 5:1: Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ.

- We were God's enemies because we had turned to our own way...
 - As Colossians 1:21 says, we were alienated and enemies in our mind by wicked works... but now we are reconciled!
 - Jesus has, as Col 1:20 says, "made peace by the blood of the cross."
 - He took all the wrath and left us with no more wrath to bear.
 - He took all the punishment and left us with blessed peace.
 - God was the worst enemy you could even have, but Jesus has turned the enmity into friendship—
 - That chastisement of your peace came down upon Him.

TRANS> And in parallel with this, Isaiah tells us a second benefit we have...

C. "By His stripes we are healed!"

1. The stripes are those terrible lacerations that a person receives when he is chastened with a whip.
 - Jesus bore this in a most literal way when Pilate scourged Him, hoping it would be an acceptable substitute for crucifixion to Jesus accusers.
 - For this reason, the beating was very severe, but still the Jews were not satisfied...
 - But even though He received stripes in this most literal way,
 - Isaiah includes all the pains that He bore under the designation of stripes...
 - even the rejection of His Father when on the cross He bore the unspeakable fullness of the curse for us!
 - Part of that rejection involved the scourge, but it was even more than that—an eternity of suffering all rolled together at the cross.

TRANS> But what is the outcome of our Saviour's stripes?

2. He heals us from everything pertaining to the curse.
 - The curse will be completely removed.
 - In Rev. 21:4, John says:
 - Rev 21:4: ""And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.""
 - What are you suffering now dear Christian?
 - Take heart, you shall be completely healed by the stripes of Jesus.
 - He has taken the curse for you. By His stripes you are healed!

TRANS> How we benefit from His sufferings!

- He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.
 - They are completely lifted off of us and transferred to Him.
 - Already God's favour is restored to us and soon we will be completely healed.
 - What a turn around!
 - What a crazy exchange!
 - We are the sinners and He takes all the punishment!
 - Eternal suffering, the likes of which we have barely begun to experience in this world, has been taken from us and laid on Him.

III. How should you respond to all of this—all of this burden-bearing love?

A. First of all, if you are not in Christ, by all means turn to Him at once!

1. Why would you even think of going on without this Saviour who bears the terrible burden of sin for His people?
 - Don't let Satan deceive you
 - Don't let your fears or your pride keep you from this Saviour.
 - What do you have to gain by avoiding Him?

2. We who have received forgiveness through Christ declare to you that Jesus, our burden-bearing saviour, has borne the curse for us and set us free so that we are fully pardoned and reconciled to God.
 - He invites you to come to Him too—He invites all to come.
 - He promises that if you will come, He will not cast you out!
 - The Father will receive you into the church, the family of God, and make you His own son or daughter.
 - You will then be among those who are reconciled to God by Jesus suffering.
 - What are you afraid of that keeps you from Him?
 - What loss do you think you must bear that will not be compensated a thousand times?

TRANS> But now I have something to say to you who are in Christ...

- How should *you* respond to Him as your burden-bearing Saviour?

B. It is only proper that you should make your whole life to be an expression of gratitude!

1. I mean, when He has gone to such radical lengths to bear your awful burden!
 - Suppose you had cancer and someone arranged to take it from you and bear it himself?

- How indebted you are to this dear Saviour who has borne your burden!
 - Just think of it!
 - He took the burden from you.
 - It is absurd love—impossible love!
 - Why would He ever do such a thing for us?
2. And how does He want you to show your gratitude?
- a. Well of course He wants you to say thank you to Him!
 - Each Lord's Day, the gospel is declared to us and we come to the Lord's Table.
 - He wants you to come with amazed gratitude, looking afresh at what your Saviour has done in bearing *your* burden for you.
 - Your praise should be rich and full!
 - You should see His beauty revealed in His amazing love.
 - b. But there is also another way He wants you to express your gratitude...
 - He wants you to follow His example in loving others...
 - He wants you to bear the burden of others the way He has borne your burden for you!
 - If you can't find anything in your neighbour deserving of such treatment, remember that there was nothing in you to deserve such treatment from Him...
 - If there is nothing in your neighbour, remember that it is your Saviour that asks you to do this...
 - And there is certainly much in Him that is worthy of your service!
 - Love Christ by loving your neighbour!
 - Imitate Him as the one who bears the burdens of others.

TRANS> There are a couple of ways that you can express your gratitude.

- But I also want to look at one other way you ought to respond to His love.

C. See that you loath the sin that brought such grief and sorrow upon your Saviour.

- How can you go on doing that which brought such affliction and shame on Him?
 - How can you be enticed by lewdness and immorality when you consider what it did to Him?
 - How can you harbour bitterness when you see what it brought on your burden bearing Lord?
 - How can you curse and swear?
 - How can you give yourself over to anger or to drunkenness?

- He was bruised for all of these things!
- He was pierced for them.
 - Will you continue in those things that brought such grief on Him?
 - Will you look favourably upon them?
 - Will you continue to think of sin as an option?
- Yes you will! Sadly you will!
 - But by His grace, you can start to hate these things that put Him to such pains for your sake.
 - All the while giving thanks that He bore your burden for you even though He knew that you would continue to sin against Him until He brings your to glory.

Conclusion:

What a marvellous burden-bearing Saviour He is.

- Let us turn to Him now with thanksgiving.