

The Servant of Isaiah: The Servant Saves By Suffering in Our Place
Isaiah 53:4-10
March 25, 2016
Good Friday

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 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. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Tonight we come to the heart of it. Tonight we celebrate the suffering and death of our Savior, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Yes, I said celebrate. We don't celebrate the pain and death. We don't celebrate the fact that such a sacrifice was necessary. After all, sin is our shame.

We celebrate the fact that God's Servant, his Son Jesus Christ, did it on our behalf. We celebrate the love it took – love for his Father and love for us. We celebrate his obedience. We celebrate the result, that we have been redeemed! Our theme tonight is "The Servant Saves by Suffering in Our Place."

The whole story of Good Friday is told by Isaiah eight hundred years before it happened. *By oppression and judgment he was taken away* (Is 53:8 ESV). Although innocent, Jesus was arrested.

Today we would whine about our rights, but he had none. A kangaroo court convicted him and sentenced him to die. They couldn't come up with one legitimate charge against him, so they asked him, who is the Truth itself, if he were the Son of God. When he told them, they called Him a liar and a blasphemer and sentenced him to die.

They had no legitimate charge against him, but God did: *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all* (Is 53:6 ESV). He was completely innocent, but he took our place and carried our sin.

Isaiah even says that he was innocent: *He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief* (Is 53:9-10 ESV). The guilt he suffered for was ours. Note, also, that we are not the only ones celebrating. The Lord was pleased to crush him. He wasn't pleased to cause him pain, but pleased to

crush him on our behalf, in our place, and for our salvation. That was the will of God for us.

Because of our sin, either we or the Servant had to suffer. Our Heavenly Father chose to pour out his wrath upon his Son instead of us: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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* (Is 53:4-5 ESV).

Listen to those words again: *he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*. The pains of hell were his, but he felt them even before the cross. In the garden, in the midst of his prayers, Jesus told the disciples: *My soul is very sorrowful, even to death* (Mk 14:34 ESV). Just the horror of what he facing for us was nearly enough to kill him.

The people mocked Jesus, just as the devil had done during the temptations following His Baptism. The devil said: *if you are the Son of God* (Mt 4:3 ESV). The crowd around his cross would cry out, *He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, "I am the Son of God"* (Mt 27:43 ESV).

People today, even some churches today, reject the notion that Jesus was truly God or God's Son. They deny his resurrection. They accuse Jesus of being a failed teacher or a ruined revolutionary put to death for his politically incorrect ideas. They say he was a good man, perhaps, but they don't see him as their God. Isaiah's words fit: *we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted* (Is 53:4 ESV).

In the midst of this, the Servant never cried out or called for justice, or for his rights, as so many do today. He was convicted by an illegal court. By their own rules, the Sanhedrin couldn't legally meet at night. They couldn't legitimately pronounce capital punishment without three witnesses who agreed, or at least two who were in complete agreement. But they did.

When the Jews dragged him before Pilate, Pilate found no guilt in Jesus, nothing that deserved this uproar, much less death. The Bible tells us that Pilate knew that the priests had sent Jesus to him because they were jealous of Jesus. Still, Pilate condemned an innocent man to death on the cross.

Through in all this, Jesus remained silent. Isaiah tells us: *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* (Is 53:7 ESV).

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed (Is 53:5 ESV). Although he was innocent, Pilate had Jesus whipped to try to appease the priests. Pilate said he would teach Jesus a lesson. But what lesson was Jesus supposed to learn from being beaten as an innocent man?

That was our beating. Those were our stripes. He did it for us because we had it

coming. We are healed from the disease of sin and saved from the wrath of God. There is no punishment left to suffer because Jesus bore it all, for us.

He was wounded for our transgressions (Is 53:5 ESV). Jesus felt the nails. He didn't feel the spear because he was already dead. The blood and water which John speaks about coming out of the spear-wound are the evidence that his life was over.

It happened just Isaiah prophesied, among the wicked. His execution was with wicked men. He was crucified with true criminals, one on either side. They were convicted, too, but they were guilty. As one of them confessed: *We are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong* (Lk 23:41 ESV).

All of this happened because of sin, our sin. The next time you're tempted to ignore what you know is the will of God, and do or say something just because it suits you, or gives you an advantage, or profits you in some small way, think about this. Jesus endured all of this because sin is a deadly serious thing. The crucifixion, and the hours of torment leading up to it, show us the true nature of sin.

It's not just the things we do that we know we shouldn't do, but the state of being in rebellion against God. It's not just our sinful acts, words, and thoughts that deserve death, but our very nature, our sinful nature. That is what Jesus died to atone for. He died that horrible death because we are corrupt, twisted, and weak. We are enemies of God by nature. So, the Servant saves by Suffering.

Even his burial was part of the prophecy: *and with a rich man in His death* (Is 53:9 (ESV)). Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man and a member of the Sanhedrin, came and took the Jesus' body and placed it in his own new tomb. Every part of the passion and death of our Lord is clearly prophesied by Isaiah. The Suffering Servant who was to come and save us by his suffering is Jesus.

If that were the whole story, it would be a sad story. It would be the noble tale of a good man who died on behalf of others. Inspiring but hardly worth all of this fuss two thousand years later. But, as you know, this is not the whole story. Isaiah even knew that. He ended this section of his prophecy like this: *When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand* (Is 53:10 ESV).

Of course, Jesus had no children in the ordinary sense. We are his offspring. In Baptism we have each been adopted into the household of God. His days are prolonged, as Isaiah described it, because he rose from the dead and lives eternally.

Isaiah ends by saying: *The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand* (Is 53:10 ESV). So what is the will of God? Our Salvation. That's the will of God, that the one who knows, believes, and trusts in God to do all that he has promised in connection with Jesus Christ, his birth, life, crucifixion, and resurrection, shall be saved.

People have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved. The will of the Lord has prospered and will continue to prosper in the hands of this Servant of the Lord until it pleases the Lord to bring an end to it all and take us to live in His glory.