

MAJESTY SATISFIED

The Cross from a Distance #4

Isaiah 53:10-12

Message Notes

Review: looking at a chapter in the book of Isaiah that was written some 2700 years ago and some 700 years before Jesus lived; one of the most discussed chapters in the entire Old Testament - vivid portrayal of the person and sufferings of Jesus Christ that we have in all of Scripture; a prophetic poem describing a person who is going to suffer tremendously, but not for anything that he has done of which he is guilty, but rather in the place of others.

Jews don't know what to do with Isaiah 53; wish that it wasn't in their scriptures at all, but it is. New Testament writers attest to Isaiah 53 being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So for the person today who claims that he or she wants to know the truth about Jesus Christ and are willing to be intellectually honest in dealing with the documents that deal with his life and his purpose in coming, they're going to have to deal with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

This morning, the final stanza of this poetic prophecy. It answers the main question raised by what has been written thus far: "What's the meaning or purpose to this innocent man's submissive suffering in the place of others who stand guilty before God? Why is he doing it?"

Every once in a while you will hear about someone being released from prison after maybe 10, 20, 30 years of incarceration, having been found innocent of a crime that they were initially found guilty of committing. And you think to yourself, "Wow! What must that be like? Wouldn't you be incredibly angry, bitter, resentful, mad at the world?"

Isaiah makes it very clear that this suffering Servant's tragic story was not an accident of history. Rather, it was all extremely purposeful, for his purpose in both living and dying was that through him people might have their sins atoned for, covered, and that through him they might come to know the righteousness of God and come into a personal relationship with God.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

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.

So we've got this servant being stricken, wounded, crushed, striped or whipped or scourged, sheared, oppressed, afflicted, cut off from the land of the living. And then he's given a grave, not a beautiful sepulcher or shrine like that given to a pope or someone of great royalty, but in a tomb in the vicinity of other tombs where lay the remains of sinners and rebels. And one would ask, "How could such miscarriages of justice occur?" But Isaiah tells us that God wanted for this to happen. This isn't some accident. It was God's will to crush him. It was God who put him to grief.

Now, someone like Christopher Hitchens would say that anyone who wants to worship a God who would willingly, intentionally and even with a sense of pleasure crush someone who was perfectly innocent is sick, misguided, deceived. And even for the person who doesn't hold strong anti-Christian, anti-Jesus sentiment, but wants to believe in the God of the Bible might be tempted to ask, "But the faithful God of the Bible would certainly not appoint and bring such bad and painful things on an innocent man, would he?" And the answer is, "Yes, he would, if some greater good would be accomplished."

So is it possible that there would be some greater good that would be served – and let me tell you, it would have to be unimaginably good to justify what happens to this person in Isaiah 53, some unfathomable accomplishment of good that would be achieved as a result of all the terrible things that the person in Isaiah 53 has endured. What God wants to accomplish from the Servant's suffering *is* of epic proportions. He wants for this Servant to be offered up as a substitutionary sacrifice for others, satisfying all their unpaid debts because of their sinful, rebellious behavior against God.

Have you ever had a debt that you weren't sure how you were going to repay?...

That's what God wanted to accomplish as a result of the price paid by the suffering Servant.

...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.

This answers the question and concern that was raised a few verses earlier when Isaiah wrote,

as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living

If someone is cut off out of the land of the living, if someone is killed before they have had a chance to have children, in human terms we would say that his family line ceases. No offspring. But that's not the case with this person. Yes, he is going to be killed, his family line is going to be snuffed out. But here we are given the first glimpses that suggest something quite the opposite. He is going to have offspring! He will see his descendants. He will live a long life.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied

In other words, from the Servant's perspective, when his offer of himself on behalf of sinners is accepted by God, when it is finished and he breathes his last and commends his spirit into the Father's hands, his reaction will be that of one who has just successfully accomplished the mission for which he came.

And what exactly is it that he has accomplished? The rest of the verse:

by his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

It's an amazing statement all by itself. God says of his servant that he is the righteous one who makes many who are unrighteous to be righteous, right in God's eyes, by bearing their iniquities. This man makes people righteous!

So this also brings him great satisfaction, not only in that he has accomplished the mission for which he came, but also in being able to see the fruit of his labors. The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

What was the joy that was set before him? His descendants.

And the final result? God the Father would appear to be speaking in the final verse -

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,

So rather than being someone from whom men hide their faces, rather than being someone who seems of little consequence, a young plant, a root out of dry ground, someone with no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him, someone who was despised and rejected by men, to the contrary, he will given the spoils of victory, he will be given the honor due to someone who has conquered, and to a degree and in a manner unlike any other conqueror the world has ever known -

because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

So the mystery is no longer about how it is possible for sinful people like you and me to have our sins taken care of and for us to have a relationship with the God who has given us life and breath. The only mystery is how God could love us like that.

It is God's love that has changed many of us in this room. There are many stories that could be told of lives that have been transformed, and are still in the process of being transformed by the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. This morning, we thought that it might be really good to end this series of messages on Resurrection Sunday with a series of abbreviated testimonies, stories coming from the lives of men and women and young people who know that they know that they know of the reality of God's love.

Cardboard testimonies...