

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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The Success of His Mission

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Dear Radio Friends,

When you consider the cross and suffering of Christ, what do you see? Are you inclined to look on the Savior as One who, in His suffering, needs your pity? Do you see a victim? Or a victor? Today, we are going to look at the success and victory of Jesus Christ on the cross from the last verses of Isaiah 53.

However, before we do that, I would like to think, for a little while, about the words of Jesus in Luke 23:28. As Jesus was being led up to the cross to be crucified, a group of women followed along weeping and crying, out of sympathy for the suffering Savior. To them Jesus turns and says, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children."

In those words Jesus tells us why we should weep when we come to the cross. It should not be because He appears defeated, because He is beaten and mercilessly killed. No. He does not need our sympathy. He was completely in control of those who hurt Him. He laid down His life willingly. When we come to the cross, we should weep for ourselves and for our sinfulness and depravity that made the suffering of Christ necessary. When we come to the cross, we should come as repentant sinners. And when we look at Jesus on the cross, we should see His victory, His success, His perfect payment for our sins.

As Isaiah finishes his song on the suffering Servant, that is what He sees: the success and the victory of Christ. Let us look at that from the last three verses of Isaiah 53. Please read Isaiah 53:10-12.

This is a rather large passage for us to consider in the twenty minutes or so of this message. So, as we start, I want us to focus on the main theme. And the main theme here is the success of Christ in the mission that He came to accomplish.

In the earlier verses of this chapter the prophet emphasizes the suffering of Christ. He is a man of sorrows. He is despised and rejected. He is bruised. He is wounded. He is oppressed. He is afflicted. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter. In all that suffering there is a hint of His success. But now the prophet, in the last verses, focuses on His success. Now, at the end of this beautiful song, he comes back to where he began in chapter 52:13: "He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." So that has to be our theme and focus in this message.

But in focusing on His success, we must not leave out completely the suffering of Christ. No. His glory comes through His suffering. His victory comes at the end of His mission, which is to suffer for sinners. And while Isaiah, in these verses, looks at His victory and success, he does it in the context of what Christ accomplished, of what He did.

What did He do? You read about it in each of these three verses. In verse 10 we read: “It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.” This verse tells us, first, something about God. Who killed Jesus? Who inflicted suffering on Him? Was it the Jews? Was it the Romans? Was it our sins? Yes, it was. But, ultimately, it was God the Father who bruised His own Son, not begrudgingly but willingly. It pleased the Lord to bruise or to crush Him. He hath put Him to grief. The death and suffering of Christ happened according to God’s plan and purpose. This was God’s will or pleasure.

Why? Why was the Father pleased to do this? Because salvation is absolutely impossible apart from this. If there could have been some other way; if God, in His wisdom, could have come up with some other way than to kill His own Son and send Him to the agonies of hell—well, then that would have been the way He did it. But there was no other way. The holiness of God and the sinfulness of man made it necessary for God to crush His own Son under the weight of our sin. In Romans 8 Paul says, “He spared not his own Son but gave him up for us all.” There was no other way for God to do it. And there is no other way of salvation for sinners than through Jesus Christ. So it pleased the Lord to bruise Him.

But this verse also tells us something about the willingness of Jesus. He knew that this was the only way. At the end of verse 10 we read, “the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” The word “pleasure” refers to the will of God. And God committed the carrying out of His pleasure to the hand of His Son. God told His Son, “This is my pleasure. This is my way. This is the way, the only way, that I’m pleased to save sinners—through your suffering.” Jesus came to do the Father’s will.

And so, again, in verse 10, He makes his “soul an offering for sin.” The word soul is important here. If you look down to verses 11 and 12, you will see that it is repeated again in each of those verses. In verse 11: “He shall see of the travail of his soul.” In verse 12: “He hath poured out his soul unto death.” Why is that word important? Well, because it tells us something of the nature of the suffering of Jesus. We should not belittle the external suffering of Jesus—His betrayal, His unjust trial, His beatings, the agonies and pains of crucifixion—we should not think lightly of those things. His physical suffering was horrible. But the real suffering of Jesus was the travail of His soul. He gave His soul an offering for sin. That means that in His soul Jesus suffered what we should have suffered in our souls for our sins.

What happens to the soul of the sinner in death—I mean, now, an unrepentant and unbelieving soul? At death, the soul of the unrepentant sinner goes to hell. We read about this in Luke 16, in a parable that Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus (who was poor). Luke 16:22, 23: “And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” What happened to the soul of the rich

man who was an unbeliever at his death when his body was buried? His soul went to hell and was in torments. And Jesus goes on in Luke 16 to explain the agony and the suffering of hell, as a place of fire, as a place of thirst. Hell is a horrible place. It is a place where the person who is there can never die and is always in agony and suffering.

That is what happens in death to the soul of a person who is outside of Christ. Today many people who claim to be Bible teachers want to say that there is no hell for sinners. They will teach that there is a heaven for believers. But the souls of unbelievers, they say, are simply annihilated at death. They disappear. They become unconscious. Do not listen to that. Do not believe it. It is a trick of Satan who wants you in hell with him.

Hell is real because God is just and holy. And if you are outside of Jesus, if you do not trust in Him for righteousness and forgiveness, if you do not follow Him in the way of discipleship and self-denial, if you live in sin and unbelief, the place to which you are headed is hell. And hell for man is eternal. The fires of hell can never be quenched for the man who suffers there. So great is man's sin that he must pay for it with eternal suffering.

But here in Isaiah we are told that Jesus offered His soul a sacrifice for sin. That means that in His soul He went to hell. He bore the bitter agonies and torments of hell for sinners. That was His mission. That was what He came to do on the cross. We get an idea of that when we listen to Him from the cross. He cried out: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and "I thirst." Why did He say those things? It was because He was suffering the agonies of hell in His soul. This was the travail of His soul.

There are a few more phrases here that speak of Jesus' mission. Let us look at them quickly before we move on to the victory and reward of the suffering Servant.

At the end of verse 11 we read, "He shall bear their iniquities." This explains why He suffered in His soul. He was the substitute for sinners. And then at the end of verse 12 you have four more phrases. First: "He hath poured out his soul unto death." This is the language of the Old Testament drink offering, which involved the pouring out of wine as an offering to God. Clearly it refers to the intense suffering of Jesus. Second: "He was numbered with the transgressors." In the New Testament we learn that Jesus was crucified between two thieves. Men numbered Him with the criminals. He was just one more of the many thousands who deserved to die.

But not only did men number Him with the transgressors, God did, too. God looked at Him in our sin, and God gave Him what sinners deserve. That is because, according to the last two phrases of verse 12, He was bearing the sins of many and making intercession for the people. The word "intercession" has the idea of an advocate or mediator, someone who represents or takes the place of others. That is what Jesus did on the cross. He came between God and us and bore our sins.

And notice here, in verse 12, the "sins of many." It does not say that He carried the sins "of all men," but "of many." This is the great truth of particular redemption—that Jesus died only

for His own people, that He took on Him and paid only for the sins of the elect before God.

This truth is very important as we talk about the success and victory of Christ in His suffering. Was Jesus successful in what He did on the cross? Did He actually pay for sins? Did He actually redeem from death and hell those for whom He died? Isaiah is telling us here in these verses that He did, that He was successful.

And that is why particular redemption is so important. To say that Jesus died for all men, but that most of those people for whom He died will still go to hell, is to deny the success of the work of Jesus. What kind of sacrifice is it if God is not satisfied with it and people for whom Jesus died are still sent to hell by Him? No, there is victory in the death of Jesus on the cross. He paid there for sins. He cried out, "It is finished." That was His success. He did pay for sins in His death.

Now let us go back and look at the reward that God gives Him. If you still have your Bibles open, you see that that starts again in verse 10. I said that this section is about the success and the reward of the mission of Jesus. And you see that in each verse here.

In verse 10, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." Here you have the success and the reward of Christ. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. Under Christ's charge, the Lord's plan will prosper, it will succeed. "He shall see his seed."

Who are His seed? Jesus was never married. He never had children. Who are they? The reference here is to the spiritual family that comes as a result of His death on the cross. His seed are those who believe on Him. In John 1:12: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." The seed of Christ are all those who are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, who are born not of the flesh but by the word of God. This is the success of the cross. The family of God is gathered by the message of the gospel. And Christ's reward is that He gets to see His seed.

Do you not think that this would have been a marvelously encouraging promise for Christ as He went to the cross? When it seemed in His suffering that He was all alone? When even His closest friends and disciples had forsaken Him? He could look at this passage and this promise and think about the many thousands and millions who would hear the gospel through history and believe on Him. He could think of the coming Holy Spirit, who would regenerate men and women and bring them into the family of God. He could think of the multitude without number who would stand someday before His throne in heaven. This was the joy and the glory that was set before Him as He went to the cross.

And you have in these words also the promise and the reward of His resurrection. For Him to see His seed, He had to be raised from the dead. A dead man cannot see. And so it is also stated here, "He shall prolong his days." God would not only raise Him from the dead, but would also give Him eternal life, an extension of days. Resurrection and life eternal are the reward that Christ receives for His obedience.

You have here in the Old Testament the teaching of the resurrection. Some say that this is exclusively a New Testament doctrine and that it was not taught in the Old Testament. Well, from Jesus' own words, we know that that is not true. He said to the Sadducees that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead but of the living. But here in this verse in Isaiah you have it prophesied concerning Jesus Christ Himself after His suffering. This One, cut off out of the land of the living, shall see His seed, and shall prolong His days. Today, this prophecy has been fulfilled. As a reward for His obedience, Jesus is risen. He is alive. And He sits in heaven gathering His seed.

You have a further description of His success in verse 11. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Christ, looking back on His suffering, will say, "It was enough. I did it. I have made the payment for sin." And this is exactly what He did after the agony of the cross when He cried out, "It is finished." He was satisfied. All that He intended to accomplish in the cross was brought to pass. His work was perfect and complete—to bring perfect and complete salvation to His own. In the travail of His soul, He made the payment for sin.

And so, in verse 12, God says, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." These words are synonymous with Philippians 2:9-11: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,...and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father." It speaks of how the Father will greatly reward His Son. Because He humbles Himself more than any man, God the Father will exalt Him to a position higher than any other creature. Jesus, in Matthew 23:12, says, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." In Jesus, we have the ultimate example of these words. Because He humbled Himself, He is exalted.

Isaiah uses a metaphor to speak of His exaltation. "I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." It pictures a general returning from a victorious battle carrying back the spoils of war to the capital city to present them to the one who sits on the throne. And the king says to the general, "You have earned these spoils. You keep them. And distribute them to our people." It is a picture, ultimately, of the ascension of Jesus Christ. In His ascension, He went back as a conquering general to the throne room of God. And God gave Him the spoils of war to give and to share with us His people.

What is the blessing? What are the spoils of war that come to us? Well, it is, first, the Holy Spirit, whom Christ now pours out into the New Testament church. The Holy Spirit, who, by the work of regeneration, opens our blind eyes to bring us into a saving knowledge of Christ. And what a wonderful knowledge that is for the sinner. Verse 11 speaks of that saving knowledge: "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." By His knowledge means by the knowledge of Him. Through the sinner knowing Him, He will bring justification to the sinner.

What is it to be justified? In very simple terms, it means that the guilt of your sin is taken away and laid on Jesus, and His righteousness and obedience are imputed or given to you, so that you stand before God the Judge, forgiven and innocent. It is a glorious blessing. The greatest of all the blessings that come from the cross. Our sins are forgiven, and God receives and accepts

us. Through knowing Jesus, through believing on Him, you are justified. Nothing that you can do yourself can make you right with God. You cannot earn God's favor by being a good person. You cannot win God's approval by doing good works. You cannot change your status from guilty to innocent by being obedient to the commandments. No, Jesus is the only possibility. He paid the full price for the sins of His own at the cross. And God gives the knowledge and the assurance of forgiveness to all who believe on Jesus.

So what do you think of the crucified Christ? What makes you weep as you consider the cross? It must not be tears of pity for the Savior. No, He was strong in death, doing the Father's will. But you must weep at the cross, not for Him, but for yourselves and your children. We are sinners. And the gospel demands that we repent and believe, or our souls will die eternally in hell.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the suffering Servant, for His willingness, for His substitution, for His success. And we thank Thee that as we have faith in Him, we can have the knowledge of being received and forgiven and the hope of the resurrection and life eternal. Amen.