

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #79

Isaiah 53:4-6

G. Campbell Morgan once said that when it comes to this portion of Scripture, any analysis almost seems irreverent (*The prophecy of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, p. 130).

The general consensus of serious Bible expositors is that when we come to Isaiah 53 we better tread lightly, kneel reverently, and speak softly because “the Lord is here.” Never is that reality truer than when you come to **Isaiah 53:4-6**.

Isaiah 53:4-6 is **Stanza #3** in a remarkable five stanza text of Scripture that reveals the work of Jesus Christ over 700 years before He would even come into this world. We may recall that **Stanza #1 (52:13-15)** introduced us to shocking truth about the Servant/Savior. **Stanza #2 (53:1-3)** revealed the rejection of the suffering Servant/Savior. Now we come to **Stanza #3 (53:4-6)**. In this part of the Hebrew poem, Isaiah reveals something most sacred and solemn:

JESUS CHRIST CAME INTO THIS WORLD AS OUR SUBSTITUTE SO HE COULD SAVE US FROM OUR SINS.

What is revealed here in these verses is the straight truth about horrible consequences of our sin and the amazing truth about God’s grace salvation through the vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ. This is, as Warren Wiersbe said, “the heart of the Gospel message: the innocent Servant dying as a sacrifice for sin” (*Be Comforted*, p. 137). **Jesus Christ did not just suffer with sinful humanity, He suffered for sinful humanity. God cannot just love us into His holy presence. To get us into His holy presence, something must be done about our sin.**

If you can walk away from this passage and reject Jesus Christ, you deserve to go to hell, because this text informs us that Jesus Christ paid the total price for your sin so you do not have to go there.

Now this text was originally written by Isaiah and aimed straight at Israel. Every Jew would be very wise to consider this portion of God’s Word. The nation Israel has persistently rejected Jesus Christ and He is the only one who can remove her sin and bring her the blessings of God.

But this is not just a text for Israel because we have clear Biblical proof that this text is also aimed at us. The Apostle Peter specifically singled out this very section of Scripture and connected it to the work of Jesus Christ that could save our soul from sin: “and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (I Peter 2:24-25).

So whether one is Jewish or non-Jewish, this text has clear ramifications for the whole world.

There are three central thoughts that are weaved together and developed in these verses:

Thought #1 - What Israel and most of the world thinks about Jesus Christ. **53:4**

Thought #2 - What Israel and the world needs to know about the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. **53:4-6**

Thought #3 - What we all need to realize about ourselves. **53:6**

THOUGHT #1 – What most think about the suffering of Jesus Christ. **53:4**

Let us carefully observe the first word in **verse 4**, “surely.” By using this word, God says right up front what you are about to see is strongly and dogmatically affirmed by Me. God is saying, you had better take a serious look at what I am establishing and affirming here, because this is “sure,” certain, specific truth. The first truth God communicates to us is that most do not think properly about My Son. You do not esteem Him or His sufferings in the right way.

It is interesting that the word “esteem” in verse 3 is the same word used in verse 4.

The word means to mentally calculate or mentally compute or mentally consider and impute something to someone (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 311). **The point here is that instead of people mentally thinking about the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ in an accurate Biblically-revealed way, they have mentally calculated and invented their own inaccurate and faulty concepts of Christ’s suffering.**

Most people in the world think something about Jesus Christ and about what happened to Jesus Christ. Most people make some kind of mental calculation concerning Jesus Christ. But what most think isn’t sound or right. Instead of them esteeming Him and loving Him and believing in Him, most have come up with their own pathetic views and philosophies and opinions. In fact, in the history of theology there have been all kinds of faulty notions concerning the value of the death of Jesus Christ:

- 1) Origen (A.D. 185-254) said he thought Christ died to pay a ransom price to Satan to purchase men.
- 2) Pelagius (A.D. 354-420) said Christ died as a moral example to us all so we will be obedient even to God even when we suffer, to show that God loves us.
- 3) Faustus Socinus (A.D. 1539-1604) said that Christ’s death was so that He might morally influence sinful men to follow Him.
- 4) Peter Abelard (A.D. 1079-1142) said that Christ’s death was designed to show us God loved us.
- 5) Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274) said that Christ’s death was not required by God to satisfy our sin problem with God, but it did allow a type of satisfaction. In other words, man can in some ways take care of his own sin problem without Christ’s death.
- 6) Hugo Grotius (A.D. 1583-1645) said Christ’s death demonstrates to all of us that the justice of God demand we suffer.
- 7) Some invented the idea that Jesus Christ died as a martyr to demonstrate His sincerity to His doctrine.
- 8) Some said that Christ died so He could identify with any person who dies.

All of these mental calculations are wrong. Jesus Christ did not die for any of these reasons; He died because of our sin. When Jesus did die, there were three faulty attitudes Israel had:

(Faulty Attitude #1) - Most considered Christ to be stricken by God. **53:4a**

The Hebrew word “stricken” (nega) actually refers to being stricken or injured with a plague because of the anger and wrath of God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 532). Most believe that the terrible things that happened to Jesus Christ were due to the fact that He was so alienated from God that God hit Him with a series of suffering plagues, like He did the Egyptians.

(Faulty Attitude #2) - Most considered Christ to be smitten by God. **53:4b**

This word is similar to the first but presents the idea that God is the one who permitted Jesus Christ to be beaten down, wounded and slaughtered (*Ibid.*, p. 471). The word is in the Hophal stem, which means most believe that Jesus Christ was the passive recipient of the action of being beaten down and smitten by an angry God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, p. 146).

(Attitude #3) - Most considered Christ to be afflicted by God. **53:4c**

This word means to be so afflicted by God that one is totally oppressed and depressed (*Ibid.*, p. 642). The Pual stem indicates that most believe that God was eager to carry out the action of afflicting Jesus Christ because He was so bad (*Hebrew Grammar*, p. 140).

Here is what most Jews and most people think about Jesus Christ. They think God eagerly struck Christ down with a series of terrible sufferings because He was so angry with Jesus Christ so He aimed His anger at Him. As John Calvin said, “they thought that God was a deadly enemy of Christ, and took no account of their own sins” (*Isaiah*, Vol. 8, II, p. 115).

THOUGHT #2 – What we all need to realize about the suffering of Jesus Christ. **53:4-6**

Everyone had better carefully understand these verses. If you think for one second that you can be saved by your works, your religion, your church, your morality, your attempts to keep the O.T. law, or your own goodness, you will be held in total contempt by God in view of this text. Israel needs the truth here and so do we.

Now before we launch into a study of these sacred statements, we need to honestly and accurately observe the multiple uses three plural pronouns : 1) The pronoun “our” is used five times (**53:4, 4, 5, 5, 5**); 2) The pronoun “we” is used two times (**53:4, 5**); and 3) The pronoun “us” is used three times (**53:6, 6, 6**). Do not overlook this and do not miss this.

What this tells us is that the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ is about saving us, not Him. The suffering of Jesus Christ had nothing to do with what He did, but with what we did. Jesus Christ is not being slaughtered for His crimes, but for our crimes. This is not about His transgressions and iniquities and sins, it is all about ours. It is true God’s wrath and anger are poured out on Jesus Christ because He is taking our place.

What Jesus Christ did, He did for us. What Jesus Christ suffered, He suffered for us.

There are seven substitutionary statements made concerning Jesus Christ that we will never fully grasp:

Substitution Statement #1 - Jesus Christ bore our griefs . **53:4a**

The verb “bore” (nasah) is the idea of carrying or lifting or taking something up (*Ibid.*, p. 567). This word “grief” (choli) is a word that refers to some type of disease or affliction or evil that makes one sad (*Ibid.*, p. 280). Some (such as Charismatics) have said that this is a reference to the fact that Jesus Christ bore our physical sicknesses and therefore we should never be sick or have a disease. There is no question that when Jesus Christ was here on earth, He did heal people of physical infirmities. In fact, Matthew used this very text in describing Jesus’ work for Israel (Matthew 8:14-17). However, the word Matthew uses (λαμβάνω) is totally different than the Hebrew text (nasah) or even the Septuagint (φέρω).

C. I. Scofield said when Matthew quotes this passage and applies it to physical disease, he considered that part of it fulfilled during the healing ministry of Jesus Christ on earth and he made no mention of Christ’s atoning death. The Lord did take away physical diseases by healing them, **but He did not die for our physical diseases; He died for our sins** (*New Scofield Reference Bible*, NASV, ftnt. Is. 53:4, p. 990). He did not die to heal you of a sickness like the flu; He died to save you from your sins because you are fallen.

It is true that Jesus Christ, while on earth, did physically heal people, but that is not what this text in Isaiah is talking about. This text is talking about Him be lifted up on the cross so that He could remove the sorrow and sadness from us that has been brought on by the disease of sin. He saw all of the consequences of sin and He went to that cross to settle the sin issue. This is precisely how the Apostle Peter interpreted this text when he said, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross ... for by His wounds you were healed” (I Peter 2:24-25). As John Calvin said, this is not talking about the fact that Jesus Christ was appointed to be the physician of bodies, but the great physician of souls (*Isaiah*, p. 115).

You think about this; Jesus Christ is the only One who can lift you up out of the sad gloom you have brought upon yourself by your own sin, and carry it away. He is the only One who can lift you up out of the grief and depression brought on by your own sin-diseased self. Turn to Him; run to Him; He died for your sin.

Substitution Statement #2 - Jesus Christ carried away our sorrows . **53:4b**

The actual word “sorrow” comes from a root Hebrew word that means to have sorrow and pain (*Ibid.*, p. 380). The specific focus here is the sorrow and pain we have due to sin. Sin will leave you depressed, but Jesus Christ can take your sin away and therefore raise you up out of your depression.

Substitution Statement #3 - Jesus Christ was wounded for our transgressions . **53:5a**

This word transgression (pesha) refers to all of those moments of rebellion in which we have broken the law of God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 695). The determining factor of what makes something a sin transgression or iniquity is the sacred law of God. Jesus Christ went to that cross to be wounded for our sin rebellion.

The actual idea of being “wounded” is to be pierced through, suffering a mortal wound (*Ibid.*, p. 281). I want you to notice the sin nouns used in this text and the pronouns used with them. He was wounded for “**our transgressions**”; He was crushed for “**our iniquities**.”

Drs. Keil and Delitsch observe that there is not stronger language that Isaiah could have used to describe the most violent and painful death than the words wounded and crushed (*Isaiah*, Vol. 7, p. 318).

Now what does not show up in English is that the participle “wounded” is in a rare Poal stem. (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, pp. 142-150). **What I understand this to mean is that Jesus Christ eagerly allowed these terrible things to passively happen to Him because He desired to take away all our rebellious sin.**

Substitution Statement #4 - Jesus Christ was crushed for our iniquities . **53:5b**

The word “iniquity” (awon) refers to the sins which we have committed which are perverse, vile, and depraved . The word means that not only did Jesus Christ allow Himself to be crushed for our perverse and depraved sins, but also all the guilt before God (*Ibid.*, p. 615).

The participle “crushed” implies a complete destruction of the individual. He was crushed, shattered, broken into pieces because of our iniquity. **Now the participle “crush” is in the Pual stem which again emphasizes that Jesus Christ eagerly allowed Himself to be passively crushed so He could take care of our vile, depraved sin.**

I want you to think of the most vile, perverse thing you have ever done in your life and I want you to see Jesus Christ hanging on that cross for you. He was crushed for you.

Substitution Statement #5 - Jesus Christ was chastened for our peace. **53:5c**

The word “chastisement” (musar) is one that means His suffering was a corrective, chastising punishment (*Ibid.*, p. 457). **The object and the result of Jesus Christ being punished for us is that we may have “shalom,” that is peace with God.** The word “well being” is the Hebrew shalom, which means to be in a peace relationship with God. Jesus Christ is being butchered for our sins as our peace chastisement so that He could put us in a state of being saved and at peace with God. We are no longer God’s enemy.

Substitution Statement #6 - Jesus Christ was scourged so we could be healed. **53:5d**

Actually the Hebrew words here mean that Jesus Christ was marked with wound marks and stripes so we could be brought into and joined together in fellowship with God (*Ibid.*, pp. 258-259). This entire work of Jesus Christ was designed to heal our relationship with God.

Substitution Statement #7 - Jesus Christ had our iniquity on Him. **53:6**

That word iniquity (awon) again emphasizes our vile and depraved sins. Jesus Christ is on that cross not for Himself, He is hanging there for us.

He hung on that old rugged cross from 9 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon. For the first three hours, men did everything they could do to Jesus Christ to make things miserable. Men laughed at him, insulted him, spit on Him, sat down by His cross just to watch Him die.

But then at noon, God turned the world dark, shutting off from human vision the transactions that were actually taking place between God the Father and God the Son. At this point, Jesus Christ, who knew no sin was made sin for us and He took on Him the full wrath of God.

That cross is the only spot in the world, the only altar on this earth, where God will take away our sin and our depravity and evil. That cross is our only place of salvation.

THOUGHT #3 – What we all need to realize about ourselves . **53:6**

Dr. H. A. Ironside said he believed that Isaiah 53:6 was the most wonderful text in all of the Bible (*Isaiah*, p. 301). He said it was the first text he ever preached and he had been trying to accurately preach it for sixty years.

Let's not kid ourselves here. Let's be brutally frank and brutally honest. We have a big sin problem. We are born with a sin nature that stays with us our entire life. We are born alienated from God and we are children of wrath who deserve wrath (Ephesians 2:3). We have been disobedient by choice. We have wandered far away from the righteousness of God myriads upon myriads of times.

All of us have been like sheep who have gone astray from the righteousness of God both intentionally and individually. All of us have all gone our own way plenty of times. All of us have rebelled against God and done vile and depraved things. Don't you dare flatter yourself.

Now look at that cross - because all of the dirty, vile sewage of our sin is poured out on Jesus Christ. See it, believe it, because that is the truth of Isaiah 53.