

Crushed for our Sins

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Where we've been over the last few weeks:

We began with the idea that we don't fully appreciate life until we understand death. This is true in our own lives and that of churches which also live and also die.

So we looked at the features of a dying church because we need to recognise the symptoms which lead to decay.

We did this to remind ourselves of the cost of not moving forward.

We then saw that God takes no pleasure in watching churches slide and fade away. We looked at the example of the Ephesian church who started strong but weren't finishing so well. God gave them advice: remember the past, repent of sin, and begin the process of recovery.

This process of recovery means grasping God's vision for his people. So in the next talk we went back to OT Israel and saw the vision God put before them which gave their lives meaning and purpose. The Promised Land gave the Israelites a reason to get up each day and trust God—that God is faithful and that one day soon hope will dissolve into experience.

Through the lens of the OT, God gives us, who live this side of the resurrection, a fresh vision of the kingdom of God. We have the vision of the new heaven and new earth—the new creation which gives us a reason to get up each day and trust God—that he is faithful and that one day soon hope will dissolve into experience.

Lastly we looked at a healthy church—a church where the vision of the future shapes what we do right now. We peeled back the layers stacked upon us by culture and unhelpful church tradition. And we saw that church is about worshipping God—the church is the gospel made visible.

And so a healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God's character as his character has been revealed in his Word.

Let's begin by praying using words that you may have already heard.

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love. Amen.

Most of the stories coming of Afghanistan are ugly war stories—but not all of them. The American “ABC News” reported on 29 March, 2013.

“A story of uncommon sacrifice from Afghanistan this morning. A Rhode Island soldier has given his life to save a young Afghan girl. Sgt. Dennis Weichel, was on patrol when his convoy came across several children playing on the road. He helped move them, but one girl ran back into the path of a 16 tonne army truck burning toward her.

Weichel pushed her out of the way just in time, but he was struck and killed”.

Weichel gave his life so the girl could live. One life for the life of another.

This substitution—one life for another—helps us grasp what Jesus did for us on the cross.

This morning I'd like us explore what Jesus did on the cross from the point of view of someone giving their life as a ransom for many.

That Jesus was crushed for our sins is clearly explained in **Isaiah 52.13–53.12**. Here's a passage that's most *often* referred to at Easter time but which helps us *all* the time grasp the idea that as our substitute, Jesus, atoned (or paid for) our sins.

And that's our main thought for today, the idea that as our substitute, Jesus went to the cross on our behalf and paid the penalty for our sin. This is concept that theologians call “substitutionary atonement” or “penal substitution” (These are short hand ways of describing an amazing truth).

However its described, we need to remind ourselves that the cross lies at the centre of a healthy church.

Now the idea of Jesus as a substitute may not be new to you. But we really need to keep reminding ourselves about what happened on the cross because we will not evolve into a great church unless we have a clear picture of the cross. For without an atoning death there can be no resurrection. And without the resurrection there is no hope for the future.

We will not think right or behave right unless God's saving grace is part of our DNA.

So have your Bibles open to Isaiah 52.13–53.12.

God's people were looking for a king for protection and deliverance from enemies. During the week at our place we watch “Merlin” on TV. We watch the young King Arthur growing into a great King and earning the loyalty of the people because of his skills in protecting Camelot from her enemies.

In Isaiah 9 God spoke of a King who will reign on David's throne and rule with justice and righteousness. A King who will protect Israel from her enemies. And in addition to the king, Isaiah spoke that another would come, a servant whom God refers to as “my servant” (Isaiah 42.1).

Could they be one and the same person? Could Israel's saving King come in the form of a servant? Could this apparent contradiction—king and servant—could this be the way a holy God will forgive and restore sinners? Especially a sinner like me?

Isaiah 52.13–53.12 is a song which answers these questions. The servant is appalling (Isaiah 52.13–14), we despise the Servant (Isaiah 53.1–3), yet God laid our sins on him (Isaiah 53.4–6). Lastly, the Servant willingly accepted his substitutionary death. He faced death as a lamb led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53.7–9).

Let's expand at these sections in turn.

The servant is appalling. Isaiah 52.13–14, “See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness”.

Isaiah is speaking about Jesus before his time. His disfigured and marred appearance refers to the appalling brutality which comes from being nailed to a cross. The cross mutilates people beyond recognition. It's an excruciating way to die. (The cross is where the word “excruciating” comes from). And then God will raise and lift up and highly exalt his Servant. Paul puts it so well in Philippians 2,

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It's almost beyond belief. It's like the elephant man becoming a king. Yet, according to verse 15, God will sprinkle the blood of the kingly servant over many nations. How is someone made clean in the OT? By the sprinkling of blood—and now we learn that the blood of this disfigured man will be sprinkled over many nations—not just over Israel but over the nations of the world.

His blood sprinkled over us who are so full of ignorance—that we might hear, and see, and believe.

But God's plans for his brutalised servant are rejected by men and women. In our arrogance we know best. Look at Isaiah 53.1,

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

So we move to the next section in our passage. **We despised the servant.** The message of the disfigured servant siphons unbelief.

Why would this message be so incredible?

Isaiah has already began telling us that the Servant will not be humanly attractive. The Servant is the type of person you wouldn't approach and talk to at a party. He'd be on his own. He's be made fun of behind his back.

Look at verse 2: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him”.

Have you ever noticed how handsome the tele-evangelists are? Bright, white shining teeth; sparkling eyes; spotless skin and always wearing an expensive suites. The Servant would look very different from the actors that play Jesus or Superman in the movies.

The Servant is unexpected and unattractive.

As we keep reading Isaiah, it becomes even clearer that Isaiah identifies the Servant with Jesus.

At one time Jesus was unattractive to us. He is not the natural choice for a Saviour. Jesus didn't seduce us with his good looks or his boisterous claims. He wasn't like a war general boasting of his strength and his mighty victories. He was more like a lamb led to the slaughter. He's the sort of person to be found sleeping under the Harbour Bridge rather than in a Harbour-side mansion.

I wonder if you ever thought, “I really have no opinion of Jesus. I'm not a Christian, but I have nothing against Jesus. He seems like a fine guy. I just am not particularly interested”. We would never pick Jesus on our own.

God clearly picks us.

God clearly empowers us to believe the message about his lowly Servant.

We are saved because God loves us and allows us to see clearly.

The passage becomes even more remarkable in the next stanza. **God laid our sins on the Servant.** Isaiah 53.4–6.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our

transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Here is perhaps the clearest statement in the whole Bible about how God deals with our sins—and its not hard to understand—there's no big theological words. We are not confounded by the words but amazed by the great exchange on our behalf.

An early Christian, Clement of Rome, said (**slide 1**), “Because of the love he had for us, Jesus Christ, our Lord, in accordance with God’s will, gave his blood for us, and his flesh for our flesh, and his life for our lives.”

That’s what we see in this middle stanza of this Servant Song.

In these verses, verses 4–6, here lies the answer to the riddle of the Old Testament—how a holy God can forgive sinners, how mercy and justice can meet, how a righteous God could, as Paul puts it, justify the ungodly.

The song is full of pain and anguish (**slide 2**). Why? Why such anguish? It is because the Servant bore our infirmities—he bore our weakness and guilt.

It was God who struck him down.

He did not deserve to be struck down. We deserved it.

Yet God wielded his righteous anger against him.

The Servant in some sense may be a victim, but he is not *merely* a victim. The Servant acted to take up our suffering and carry our sorrows. The Servant chose to pour out his life and bear the sins of many.

Mark Dever remarks,

“This is no cosmic child abuse of a heavenly Father gone terribly wrong, abusing his trembling child who shrinks back from his Father’s strokes. This is the eternal, triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—determining from eternity past that he would deal with our sins”.

The Servant's suffering brings us salvation. “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

What a picture!

Those words “pierced” and “crushed” indicate a violent death.

The Lord prophesied in Genesis that the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent, and here the Servant, Jesus, would be crushed so that by his death he might destroy death (Heb. 2:14).

Like sheep we went astray (**slide 3**). It's not very flattering to be called a sheep. Yet as sheep, we've gone astray—all of us!

Human beings are not represented as some great, proud animal, confident and to be feared.

That's not the truth according to the Bible.

I don't care who's flattering you; they're lying to you.

According to the Bible, we all, like sheep, have gone astray.

We need someone to save us from the sins we have committed.

If you're not a Christian, you have sinned, and you are responsible before God for your actions, for your life, for what you have done. You will give account to him for every sin you ever have or will commit. You can choose to bear God's just punishment for your sins, or you can trust that someone else has suffered for your sins and paid the penalty for them.

God would be completely just to allow us to go our own way and be destroyed, but in his mercy and love he has not. He has found a way, the only way that mercy and justice can act together, and that's in the eternal Son of God being made flesh, living a perfect life among us—the life you and I should have lived—and dying a death he didn't have to die.

This brings us to the last part of our passage. Isaiah 53.7–9. **The Servant willingly accepted his substitutionary death.** Verse 7, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth”.

He willingly went to the cross for you and I.

The Father whose eyes were too pure look at sin, turned his eyes away from his Son for the first time in eternity. And your sin and my sin was carried by God. There has been no other moment in eternity like that moment. As Jesus anticipated that moment in the Garden of Gethsemane his sweat dripped like blood.

Hebrews 10:9 tells us that Jesus went to the cross in accordance with his Father's will; John 14:31 tells us that Jesus did it because he loved his Father.

But Ephesians 5 tells me another reason why Jesus went to the cross: because he loves you and he loves me. Jesus went to the cross for you and I—intentionally, consciously, fearfully, agonisingly—he did that for us. “And can it be, that I should gain and int'rest in the Saviour's blood”, wrote Charles Wesley.

Here is the heart of a healthy church. Here is the gospel that saves a wretch like me. We come to church to praise the name of Jesus who humbled himself so that we can be exalted to the highest place.

Through faith in Jesus, you have been exalted to the highest place. You no longer belong to the kingdom of darkness, you belong to the kingdom of the Son. No-one can steal these things away. You are his—and you are his—forever.