

14. The God who suffered for us

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I don't like pain; I don't like sufferings; I don't like difficulties; I don't like problems; I don't like troubles; I don't like to balance checkbook which I haven't done – I don't remember when was the last time I did. I'd prefer an easy life. I guess that these things qualify me being a wimpy American. Whether you'd like to admit or not, the majority of Americans don't understand what it is like to be poor like the people in the third world.

The World Bank defined the new international poverty line as \$2.50 a day for 2013. Absolute poverty, extreme poverty, or abject poverty is "a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services." The same organization also estimated 1.29 billion people around the world were living in absolute poverty in 2008. Of these, about 400 million people in absolute poverty lived in India and 173 million people in China.

Human suffering doesn't necessarily come from physical poverty only, though it can be a big element. A person can be wealthy beyond anyone's imagination, but still suffers because that person has no peace with God in one's heart which we often call 'spiritual poverty.'

Unlike other so-called gods of the worldly religions, the God of Christianity, Jesus Christ suffered for His creatures who rejected Him from the beginning so that anyone who accepts His way can have eternal life.

From the last portion of chapter 52 to all the way through chapter 53, prophet Isaiah portrays Christ's sorrow, atonement, silence, and victory. Isaiah 53 is quoted or referred to in the NT more frequently than any other OT chapters.

A. THE EXALTATION OF THE SUFFERING GOD

Isaiah 52:13-15 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. 14 Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; 15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.

Chapter division was done by humans for our convenience. In a majority of the cases, they are spot on, but they were not inspired by the Lord. Consequently, some chapter divisions were not done properly. Chapter 52 is a case in point. From v13 through 15 should have been with chapter 53.

When we think about all the things Jesus endured physically between the time of His arrest and His crucifixion, it is no wonder he didn't look like a man as it says in v14. When the movie "The Passion of Christ" came out, I encouraged our congregation to go see it. I got some objections over that. I did not agree with some of the Catholic perspectives and Hollywood inventions in the movie, but I've never seen any movie that showed Jesus's sufferings like this one. Every pain, every whip, every blow He received was meant for me and you. He took them all for us.

He was slapped by an officer; He was insulted; He was spat upon; He was beaten on the head with a rod after they put a crown of thorns on Him; He was scourged with a whip, a.k.a. "Cat o' nine tails".

Isaiah 50:6 I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting .

Some of you might be grossed out by now and wonder why I talk so much about the suffering of Christ. First, the Scripture drives me to do so and we must never forget what our Lord Jesus has gone through for our salvation.

There are two chapters in the whole Bible that depict the graphic account of Christ 's suffering – Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. Yes, the Gospel writers give us the facts but not the details. By the time, the torturers were finished with our Savior , He didn't look like human. He was shedding His precious blood for us and taking our punishment for us.

I am sure that if we could see the unseen spiritual world at the time of the torture and crucifixion of Christ, satan and his demonic hosts were in absolute glee. It seems that satan stopped God's plan to save mankind. Unlike some theologians, I do not believe that satan knew the plan of God – the crucifixion of Christ was for the salvation of mankind. If the devil knew, he would not have done what he did through the Jewish religious leaders and Roman soldiers. What looked to them like a humiliating defeat was in the eyes of God the Father a resounding victory.

I want you to pay attention to the word 'sprinkle' in v15. 'Sprinkling' is often associated with cleansing from sin in the OT:

Exodus 24:8 And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."

Here, the promise is that the work of the Messiah will bring cleansing to many nations.

B. THE SORROW OF THE SUFFERING GOD

Isaiah 53:1-3 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

When the Lord created heaven and earth and everything in between, according to the psalmist, He used His finger:

Psalm 8:3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

When He delivered Israel out of Egypt, His strong hand guided them:

Exodus 13:3 And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten.

But to save lost sinners, He bared His arms that speak of the mighty power of God. Yet people ignored Him.

Unlike some "Prosperity Gospel" heretic Bible teachers, Jesus was born in poverty in Bethlehem and grew up in a carpenter's shop in despised Nazareth. Nothing about

His physical appearance made Him an Israel GQ Magazine model. Throughout the generations, artists tend to paint Jesus a good looking man, some even with blonde high light with a set of piercing blue eyes like a California surfer dude. No, Jesus had a look of an average Joseph Goldberg of Israel.

Once the people who thronged after Jesus during His earthly ministry realized what He expected of them to be His disciples, they despised Him and even put a cheap slave's price on Him. Jesus is rejected today for the same reasons. People don't mind being in the church, even calling themselves Christians. But they put Jesus outside of their hearts in a nice package, while they do whatever they choose to do in their hearts.

C. THE ATONEMENT OF THE SUFFERING GOD

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 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.

This is the heart of chapter 53. And it presents the heart of the Gospel message: the innocent Messiah dying as the sacrifice on behalf of sin of mankind. This is nothing new, because throughout the first five Books of the OT, the Lord showed the Israelites about the innocent animal sacrifice dying as the sacrifice on behalf of sin of the Israel people, only in temporary occasions.

In v5, it says, "He was wounded for our transgressions". The Hebrew word for 'wounded' is "chalal" which means "pierced through." His hands and feet were pierced by nails and His side was pierced by a spear for our transgressions, not His, because He was without sins.

I am sure that you heard someone you know or even yourself pray for a sick person in this way – "by His stripes we are healed" and claiming God's healing on that person. The same "Prosperity Gospel" Bible teachers insist that every believer has a right to have good health. But if they don't, it is because they don't have enough faith in God, of course, they boast about their good health due to their strong faith.

The late Oral Roberts, a staunch teacher of the Faith Movement once claimed that he had perfect health on one of the TBN programs. That night he had to check into an emergency room with his heart issue under a false name.

Their false theology terribly contradicts the personal experience of saints in the Bible and through history. If they were right, apostle Paul didn't have enough faith to have perfect health because he had a thorn in the flesh, nor was he a strong Christian since he was a regular jail bird and didn't have anything he could show off.

Now listen, without an argument, perfect, total, and complete healing is God's promise to every believer in Christ Jesus. But we must acknowledge that it is not promised that it would happen to every believer right now. God's ultimate healing will come at the resurrection. Anyone who condemns fellow believers who have sickness as the second-class believers should be ashamed of themselves.

What Christians must do is pray boldly and diligently and trust our God's mercy and love for us according to His perfect will. If He chooses to heal us, that is wonderful,

but for whatever unknown reason He chooses not to, our Father knows best. We trust Him in everything He does.

D. THE SILENCE OF THE SUFFERING GOD

Isaiah 53:7-9 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Jesus had every possible power to remove the people who were causing pain and suffering to Him, but He didn't. He didn't fight back, nor did He even open His mouth to defend Himself. He knew that this was the only way to save lost sinners like us, He took the full blow onto Himself for us. Yes, Jesus was silent, but not helpless.

Jesus was compared to a lamb, which is one of the frequent symbols of Christ in Scripture. A lamb died for each Jewish household at Passover, and the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world died for His people and the nation of Israel. For 28 times in the Book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb.

According to the custom of the Roman execution, the dead bodies of the executed criminals would be left unburied, but in Jesus' case, He had to be buried to assure His death. Besides, the Roman governor Pilate would not have released His body if He wasn't dead. Jesus died between the two thieves, but He was buried in the tomb of a rich man Joseph of Arimathea. The Lord fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah even after He died. Do you know any religion leader who could pull this kind of thing off?

E. THE VICTORY OF THE SUFFERING GOD

Isaiah 53:10-12 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You 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. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

The crucifixion by the Romans, the false accusations by the Jewish leaders, the desertion by His disciples were all in God's plan. It was not the plan B that God had to scramble to come up with after the fall of mankind like the heretic Bible teacher Kenneth Copeland once declared.

F. APPLICATIONS

What we just learned brings a couple of applications we must apply in our lives.

1) The complete obedience of the Son of God pleased the Father. Be like Him.

Our Heavenly Father is not pleased to see the death of the wicked, let alone the death of the righteous Son of God. But He was pleased that Jesus' complete obedience accomplished the redemption that was planned from eternity. That's why Jesus could say, "Tetelestai," which means "It is finished."

Can we be obedient to our Father in heaven as Jesus did? Some don't even try as I mentioned. If you are a born-again Christian, your privilege comes with your obligation to obey the commandments of God.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

2) The death of the Son of God satisfied the Law of God for our sins. Sin no more.

Hebrews 9:22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

The annual offerings of Israel could not wipe away the sins of men. But the sinless Man Jesus' blood satisfied the requirement of the Law of God once and for all. Yes, we cannot be sinless like Jesus, but we certainly sin less by doing what He tells us to do and by not doing what He tells not to do.