***THE SERVANT OUR SUBSTITUTE, Part 2***

**Isa. 53:4-6**

Turn back to Isa. 53…

Been called the “Mt. Everest” of the OT, and I hope you enjoy the view at least half as much as I have in studying this epic chapter. –

Standing high up on the peak of Isa. 53, you can see more of the NT land to come & the gospel era & our Saviour Himself than anywhere else.

You can see why Augustine said Isaiah is not a prophet, he’s an evangelist!

~ Luther: *There is, indeed, in all the OT, no plainer text nor prediction, both of the sufferings and the resurrection of Christ, than in [Isa. 53]. Therefore all Christians should be well acquainted with it, yea, even know it by heart, in order to strengthen and defend our faith, especially against the stiff-necked Jews, who deny this their only promised Saviour, merely from the offense of the cross.*

Some of you already asked me this morning, what do the Jews do with Isa. 53?!...

Answer: Here is perhaps the best tribute to the power of this one OT passage. – At one time, ancient Jewish writings & the earliest Rabbis unanimously admitted that Isa. 53 must be about Messiah. – But now, in the past 1,000 yrs or so, most Jews have rejected that messianic interpretation.

For centuries it has been banned from the *shool,* the synagogue. – In their weekly reading cycles, every August, on one Sabbath they end reading in Isa. 52:12. – Then the next Sabbath, they begin in Isa. 54:1. – WHY?

Because they follow an 11th c. Talmudic commentator Rashi, who said, “Since Christians interpret Isaiah 53 as being a prophecy concerning Jesus, we maintain that this is a prophecy concerning the people of Israel.”

But as we’re going to see, that interpretation becomes VERY forced, and difficult to sustain in Isa. 53, as you have the nation dying for itself, for its own sins. –

*And what is more tempting to our pride than that very thing* – to deny our need for a Saviour, and to think instead that we can save ourselves?

Nothing could be more antithetical to the gospel, more opposite to the good news. – Bad news couldn’t get any worse than that – to find out that we must achieve salvation through our own suffering and good works.

~ As someone once put it, “A Servant/Messiah without earthly splendor, humble and humiliated who is tormented and dies on a shameful cross, as a vicarious and voluntary sacrifice, for the redemption of Israel and all mankind, has always been and still remains offensive to Jewish thinking!”

YET, despite banning Isa 53 from their synagogues, this chp has found its way into many Jewish hearts and borne much fruit.

+ Once a Christian was witnessing to a Jewish friend. – He began to read Isa. 53 to them, to which their Jewish friend replied, ‘Hey, that’s the NT, stop it! Stick with the Tanach, the OT!’...

~ Delitzch (famed OT commentator): *In how many an Israelite has Isa. 53 melted the crust of his heart! It looks as if it had been written beneath the cross upon Golgotha... [It] is the most central, the deepest, and the loftiest thing that the OT prophecy, outstripping itself, has ever achieved.*

+ Imagine Jesus as a boy, reading Isaiah’s prophecies (review Isa. 42, 49, 50)?? At what point did it start to dawn on Him?!...

Read all & Pray:

Repeat title, “The Servant Our Substitute”

***\*FIVE STANZAS to stun us and make us sing about God’s Exalted Servant, our Substitute:***

Review:

1. vv. 13-15, The Successful Servant

2. vv. 1-3, The Scorned Servant

🡪We don’t need more self-esteem. – We need Christ-esteem, that is the real root of all our problems – low Christ-esteem!...

**3. vv. 4-6, The SUBSTITUTE Servant –** Answering this mystery: ‘Why did He suffer such punishment?’

🡪Beloved, this is probably the most detailed statement in all the Bible about how God deals with our sin. – Nothing could be more important for us to study & understand & believe.

BUT WAIT: Do we really need a substitute? – Even some professing Christian theologians don’t think so:

~ One writes, *It is morally abhorrent to claim that God the Father demanded the self-sacrifice of his only Son to balance the scales of justice... A god who punished through pain, despair and violent death is not a god of love, but a sadist and despot.* (Julie M. Hopkins, feminist theologian)

~Another: “If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil.” (Steve Chalke, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, pp. 182-183)

Have we misunderstood what was really happening there on that first Good Friday?...

***\*THREE ASPECTS of Christ’s substitionary sacrifice for sinners:***

1. **v. 4, HIS HUMAN SUFFERING**

v. 4ab – Same two words as in v. 3 abt Christ: “sorrows…griefs” (now in reverse order). – NB, Isaiah starts with an unexpected emphasis:

NOT speaking directly about our sin & guilt, but about sin’s consequences in the pains & heartaches & sicknesses that sin brings.

+ What an image!: Picture Jesus standing before all of us as sinful, wicked humanity, bowed down under the weight of our sin & misery.

Adam’s sin and our own stiff-necked rebellion have brought us on us ruin & destruction of every kind. – We are Bunyan’s pilgrim, carrying around the heaviest of burdens, all the “griefs & sorrows” of sin.

YET our Lord looks down on us, like a loving parent gazing at a naughty child who finally got caught and must now face the consequences of his actions. – You know the child deserves every ounce of punishment coming his way, but still, your heart goes out to him, you wish there were another way….

With His eyes of holy compassion, Christ looks at how sin has brought upon us every kind of “grief & sorrow”, numberless pains & agonies, heartaches & disappointments….

Then, for every true believer, for any who come to Christ for salvation, Christ then does something stupendous & glorious:

He reaches down to you and says, ‘Give Me that crushing burden of your sins & sorrows. I have carried it on Calvary’s cross, I bore it in my body on the tree, the price has been paid in full.’

‘Go free, and never come back for this burden. Because you won’t even be able to find it. I have nailed it to the cross, and it is forever out of your reach.’

Reread: v. 4ab…

🡪Christian, this means you can trust Him! – Back to v. 3b…

Like nobody else, Jesus is well-acquainted with grief: *He knew it, understood it, was familiar with it—slept with it—rose with it—walked the livelong day with it. – So, my Brothers and Sisters, He knows your grief and He can meet it! He is such a master Comforter because He was such a mighty Sufferer.* (Spurgeon)

Bring Him all your griefs & sorrows! – If He can carry your sin, He can carry you!

*What a friend we have in Jesus*

*ALL our sins & griefs to bear!*

*What a privilege to carry*

*Everything to God in prayer.*

🡪HOW could anyone refuse such an offer? – WHY do people prefer to live with this crushing burden?

One reason: They are denying the burden exists. – They drown out their guilty conscience with more pleasure, more leisure, more noise, more friends. –

They EXCUSE their guilty burden – they find lots of psychological labels & syndromes to explain away their sin & selfishness. – ‘Oh, pardon me, I just have this disorder or that disorder, or I have this genetic problem, or grew up in dysfunctional home, or have not had my emotional needs met.’ –

Whatever the problem is, it’s surely not in ME, so it must be outside of me. – There must be something or someone else I can blame – in my environment, education, income, upbringing, physiology, etc.

*\*The cross means little to us because this great problem of sin & guilt means little to us. – Until sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet. – We think too light of the Saviour, b/c we think too light of our sin.*

As a result, we reach all the wrong conclusions about Jesus:

v. 4b – We conclude that He could only be carrying such a horrible burden if it was HIS fault. – ‘Look at how He suffers there on that cross. Oh, He must have committed some heinous crimes to deserve such punishment.’

Like Job’s counsellors, convinced that all Job’s calamity must’ve been b/c of his sin. – Like the natives on the island of Malta when Paul was bitten by the snake, convinced he must’ve deserved it. –

Reread: v. 4…

🡪We should’ve been shocked at our sin, our guilt, which caused Jesus to bear such an awful burden. – But instead, we point the finger at Him and assume He must be the criminal….

1. **v. 5, THE DIVINE REASON**

v. 5 – Said Spurgeon: *Milton, Shakespeare, Cowper and the whole of the poets that were ever or are, all put together, could not write four sentences like those in this verse! There is more meaning, more deep philosophy, more music, more to charm and satisfy the human heart in those four sentences, than in the sweetest of merely human language.*

Four violent actions here, but all are passive verbs, where the Servant is not doing the action, but the action is being done to Him by another. – By who? – By God Himself:

(a) “pierced” – e.g., by nails in His hands and His feet, and by a spear into His side

(b) “crushed” – e.g., by slaps & blows from the soldiers, the weight of the cross, dragging it up that hill…

(c) “punished, chastened” – i.e., He faced the firing squad, the gallows, the guillotine – no, worse, far worse, he drank Hell’s bitter cup of the very wrath & fury of Almighty God, of God’s infinite & eternal anger against every sin ever committed by every sinner that will ever believe….

(d) “scourged, wounded” – e.g., stripes & lacerations across his front & back, more skin being peeled off with each angry stroke.

WHY did God have to treat His Servant so horribly? – What did He do wrong? –

Nothing. – He was the innocent lamb, the spotless lamb; He was the scapegoat of Lev. 16 on the Day of Atonement, bearing no guilt of His own, but only the guilt of others. (Otherwise, if He had any stain or guilt, He could not be the perfect sacrifice for us; He Himself would need another sacrifice to atone for Him.)

WHY did Christ have to suffer so? – v. 5ab, b/c of “our transgressions…our iniquities”. – v. 5c, He suffered b/c of our hostility & unreconciled state, at war with God, needing “peace” with Heaven. –

v. 5d, Christ suffered to “heal” us of our worst disease, sin – our terminal illness, more hideous than the worst leprosy or most awful cancer

QUESTION: Is there healing in the atonement? – As the KJV says, “By His stripes we are healed”. – This is a favt vs of the word-faith movement and the health & wealth preachers. – They say that Jesus carried all your sickness & disease on the cross, so that when you get saved, you should never be sick again….

They even go to Matt. 8 which seems to support their view – Turn there; read vv. 16-17….

Thus, their logic goes: If you are still sick, it can only be 1 of 2 reasons: you have not come to faith yet, or you don’t have enough faith – unsaved, or unbelieving…

(How do you answer this sincere question from many?!)

ANSWER – *FOUR brief responses to the unbiblical view that Jesus died to bring you physical healing in this life:*

(1) *Jesus’ healings proved He was Messiah.*

NB, this is still years before Jesus died and performed His atoning work on the cross. – Matthew is simply showing what the Gospels constantly show us was the purpose of Jesus’ miracles – to prove that He was the promised Messiah of the OT. –

Even though the NT itself clearly shows that Isa. 53 is ultimately about the cross, Matthew could also say that Jesus’ healings & earthly ministry (pre-cross) were a partial, limited fulfilment of Isa. 53. – His miracles authenticated & verified His claims to be Messiah, Saviour.

(2) *There WILL be healing in the atonement when Christ returns!*

The Hbr words in Isa. 53 (vv. 4 & 5) for “griefs” and “sorrows” are broad – they can include physical, emotional & spiritual problems. – So yes, Christ also cares for our bodies and has compassion on our illnesses, as Matthew points out in Jesus’ earthly ministry. –

Scripture is clear that one day, when Christ returns, we will receive new, glorified, immortal bodies of perfect health! (1 Cor. 15, etc.). – What Jesus was doing there in Capernaum (Matt. 8) was also a preview of His coming kingdom when He returns, when we will reign with Him in perfect health! – So yes, there *will be* healing in the atonement in future, but not now.

UNTIL that day, Rom. 8 and many other texts are clear, that we still live in a cursed, decaying world that groans, and our bodies groan. –

Heb. 9:27 is clear, we all must get sick & die one day (if Christ doesn’t come first). – If God does choose to heal you temporarily and relieve your pain in this life, it’s because of His fatherly mercy & care. – It’s NOT b/c Jesus died to give Christians perfect health.

(3) *The heart of Isa. 53 and the whole Bible is Christ dying for our sin & guilt, not our sickness.*

The main focus of Isa. 53 is NOT on physical healing or the effects of sin on the body, which are very secondary. – *The thrust of Isa. 53 is all about the spiritual & eternal effects of sin on the soul – that is the heart of why Jesus came & died.* –

EVEN 2 of the words Isaiah uses in v. 4, “griefs” and “bore”, are used again later in this same chp., clearly in the context of SIN, not sickness: vv. 10bc, 11de, 12ef…

Plus, the language of Isa. 53 is rooted deep in the soil of the offerings in **Leviticus**. – Was there a “sickness offering”? – Never!

They were offerings for sin & guilt & peace with God, not for physical healing. –

And in the ‘Leviticus’ of the NT, the Book of Hebrews, the focus is exactly the same – Jesus’ death was all about atoning for sin, not sickness. – See: Heb. 9:15, 28; 10:10-12, 18…

(4) *Peter & Phillip show us the kind of healing that Isaiah 53 has in mind.*

Turn to 1 Pet. 2 for proof of this interpretation of healing & the atonement (yet another favt passages to misquote & twist by the faith healers). – **Peter** quotes the language of Isa. 53:4-5, but all clearly in the context of sin & salvation, not physical healing:

Read 1 Pet. 2:24-25… It’s all about the greatest healing of all, that of salvation. – Once you get this healing (conversion), all the other symptoms/consequences of sin will one day be sorted out when Christ returns.

Likewise, in Acts 8, when **Philip** explained Isa. 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch (who had been reading it), HOW did the eunuch respond? –

NOT by asking for healing, but for baptism! – I.e., he was repenting of his sin and putting faith in Christ, which is always what Christian baptism signifies.

(5) *In SUMMARY:*

Scripture is clear: Christ became sin for us, not sickness (2 Cor. 5:21). – Christ forgives our sins, not our sicknesses (1Jn. 2:12). – Christ gave Himself for our sins, not for our sicknesses (Gal. 1:3-4).

🡪To say that Isa. 53 means physical healing in this life is to rob the Christian of one of the most precious, most comforting chps in all the Bible! – Isn’t that just like Satan?! – To replace the true gospel with a false one, to turn good news into bad news.

To say that Isa. 53 is about physical healing is to steal away from you the very chapter that most displays your Saviour’s love, the chp that best displays our great salvation, and to turn it into a condemning chp that says if you’re not healed, you lack faith or aren’t saved. – What a lie from the pit of Hell!

🡪Are you healed of the worst disease, the ultimate illness of sin & guilt?

+ Where else have you ever heard of such a Dr., that would inject himself with cancer so that you go into remission, that would take your disease on himself so that you are healed?...

This is love immeasurable, grace in the extreme!...

BUT really – was our sin *that* bad, did it really require Jesus to suffer so much?...

**c. v. 6, THE GREAT CONFESSION**

+ Remember, that by this time of Isaiah in the 8th c. BC, the Jewish nation was over 700 yrs. old. – For centuries, every year, 2x per year, they’d had their great national holidays of Passover & Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).

Essentially, both of those great feasts were about one theme: God’s holiness, their sin, and their need for a God-appointed substitute. – Every Spring, and every Fall, they were taught this. – For hundreds of years, God was drilling into their minds these core truths: that He was holy, that they were not, and they needed a blood sacrifice to propitiate, to atone, to take away their guilt.

But now, after those 700 years of preparation, through Isaiah God is spelling out His salvation plan in much greater detail.

v. 6ab – Not very flattering: He doesn’t call us stallions that just need to be broken in & trained, or eagles that just need some education & empowering. –

No, the Bible calls us “sheep” – dumb & defenceless, stupid & helpless, dirty & smelly; followers who live by a ‘herd instinct’, and in grave danger without a shepherd. –

Left to ourselves, we will be eaten by wolves or run right off a cliff. – That’s our beautiful human potential, our destiny, left to ourselves if God doesn’t save us. – We are totally depraved, we’re sheep.

YET we can’t just blame the herd for leading us into sin. – We also choose it: v. 6b – You can hear Frank Sinatra, “I did it my way”. –

The fool does what is right in his own eyes, the ‘way that seems right to a man’, but in the end leads to death (Prov. 14).

🡪O, but we try so hard to disguise our stubbornness & rebellion. We dress it up, we clothe it in the finest language: ‘O, but it’s my right to live this way? It’s the most rational, the most logical, the most reasonable way to live? It’s what everyone else is doing? It’s the most fun, it works for me, etc.’ –

Not true: At the end of the day, the reason we love our sin is because is “my way”, b/c I set the rules, I call the shots, I get to be my own boss:

v. 6ab…

~ Thus we say in our Decl. of Faith (Sect. 7): *We believe all mankind are sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration….*

🡪Until we accept this diagnosis, the cross & the gospel will make no sense to us. – It will not be good news, and grace will not be amazing. –

But once we do see ourselves as we truly are, as ruined as God sees us, then the remedy becomes glorious!:

v. 6cd – Here is the heart of this whole chapter, the sum of the matter. – This is HOW the good Shepherd brings His straying sheep home, and safely into His fold forever!

+ Best picture of what this means? – Turn to Lev. 16:21-22…

We then, sinful humanity, are now the guilty nation. – God’s Servant, Jesus, is the scapegoat. – And God Himself acts as Aaron, with His hands on the scapegoat, who is also His own dear Son. –

He rejects His Son and sends Him away to bear our guilt & shame, to be cut off from the land of the living, to perish in the desert. – “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”

It all seems so backwards. – 10x now in these 3 vss., Isaiah has pounded the gavel and drove home the fact that WE are to blame, not Jesus: reread vv. 4-6…

In light of our obvious guilt & wretchedness, we’d expect to read: “…the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on…US!” –

You reap what you sow, actions have consequences, ‘you make your bed, you sleep in it!’

And our sin did cost, it did have bitter consequences – for HIM, instead of us.

~ Luther, “We all walk around with His nails in our pockets.”

+ We can try to wash our hands of any responsibility for this awful suffering of Christ. – But our attempt will be just as futile as Pilate’s was when he tried to wash his hands of guilt over Jesus’ death. – There is no escaping our guilt.

*Behold the Man upon the cross,*

*MY sin upon His shoulders*

*Ashamed I hear my mocking voice*

*Call out among the scoffers.*

*It was my sin that held Him there*

*Until it was accomplished.*

*His dying breath has brought me life.*

*I know that it is finished.*

Reread: v. 6…

CONCL. – Repeat these 3 aspects…

🡪Has this become YOUR great confession yet?!... Why not today? Why not now?...

PRAY: …Cause us to feel the wounds of Jesus until it wounds our sins to death. – Teach us by His cross what it means to love each other, that “we love b/c He first loved us”….