

THE SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

If someone experiences a major organ failure such as a kidney failure, then there is a financial sacrifice and a time sacrifice for the ongoing dialysis procedure to just enable the person to live. Eventually, the dialysis treatment has some negative side effects and is not a long term final solution. It is just not adequate or sufficient to do the job. What is really needed is a new kidney. Every now and then, we will hear or read about a person who needs a kidney transplant in order to live a normal life and someone (who is a genetic match) will donate one of their kidneys. That is a sacrifice that goes beyond just paying for dialysis treatments. It would be difficult to put a value on such a sacrifice. While the dialysis treatment requires a sacrifice of time and money on the part of the person with the problem it is really not sufficient to meet the need caused by the failure. On the other hand, the transplant requires a sacrifice by someone else that goes beyond time and money **but** has the possibility of being sufficient to bring about a real healing of the person.

All of us are plagued, not by a physical organ failure, but by a spiritual moral failure. The problem is SIN and results are sins. We could liken the moral law to a dialysis treatment that allows us to sort of “get by” on a temporary basis but we know it is not a long-term solution to the basic problem. While striving to observing the law requires a sacrifice on our part, it is just not sufficient to get the job done. What we need is a transplant and that requires a sacrifice by someone else. The problem is that there are no donors among the descendants of Adam who can help since all have the same problem themselves.

There is a remedy and we see an excellent prophetic description of that remedy in the writings of Isaiah where we can find four “Servant Songs” that point to the transplant that all of us need. The first of these passages is found in Isa 42:1-4 which is quoted in Matt 12:18-21 in reference to Jesus. God chose Him and was delighted in Him. He had God's Spirit on Him and He would be gentle and an encourager. There is also an assurance of victory – that He would be successful in His mission. The second passage is found in Isa 49:1- 6 and defines the mission of the Servant. This passage also shows the eternal nature of Jesus. "Before I was born the Lord called Me and made mention of My name." Jesus was to be (and is) God's secret weapon against sin and the enemies of God (a highly polished arrow hidden in God's quiver) and would restore Israel. The third passage (50:4-9) emphasizes His suffering. It is here we learn that He would be beaten, His beard pulled out, and spit upon. The fourth passage (52:13-53:12) touches on these and other ideas and emphasizes the victory that will come.

This such a powerful passage that we should look at all of it.

¹³ Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. ¹⁴ Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men. ¹⁵ Thus He will sprinkle (startle) many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand. Isaiah 52:13-15 (NASB95)

This passage begins with giving us a look at the final outcome or result. You have probably seen movies that open with the “ending” and then proceeds to show you how it all came about. This appears to be the technique that Isaiah used. The outcome is that “God’s Servant” will be raised up. Jesus alluded to this passage in Matthew 20 after the mother of James and John came to Him requesting that her sons be at the right and left hand of Jesus when He had come into His kingdom. In this case, Jesus told His disciples, “If you would be great (lifted up), be a servant, if you would be chief (greatly exalted), be a slave.” The outcome is certain for God’s Servant, the path by which that outcome is obtained is nothing that could have

been imagined or proposed by man. The comparison of how astonishing this will be is that of what happened to the nation of Israel. A ragtag group of the sons Jacob went down to Egypt because they were starving during a famine and they grew into a great number of people. These were enslaved by the Egyptians for hundreds of years. No one would have thought they would have ever amount to anything significant. Yet, they were delivered from their slavery and grew to be a great nation. That was astonishing.

It would also be astonishing that a person who was as abused and as poorly treated as Jesus was in the events surrounding the crucifixion would be delivered from death and become King of kings and Lord of lords. This is a “shocking” outcome and when it is fully revealed those who suppose themselves to be in leadership will be speechless. They will see and hear an outcome they could never have imagined. (Aside: Most of the popular translations used today translate the Hebrew word “nazah” as sprinkle. The Septuagint, which is the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, renders the first part of verse 15 as “Thus shall many nations wonder at him” and this idea is also used in the Revised Standard Version: “so shall he startle many nations.” The idea of startling or causing wonder certainly fits well in the context of the passage.)

Why could people **not** have imagined the final results? It was simply because they would not believe the prophecies pertaining to the Messiah. Hear what Isaiah asked in the first verse of chapter 53.

¹ Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? Isaiah 53:1 (NASB95)

The message was that the coming Messiah would be the “arm of the LORD.” He would be the power of God (arm) that would be demonstrated. In Isa 40:10 we see “Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his **arm** shall rule for him: behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him.” Few believed even when the Messiah did come. He was not recognized and not accepted. The reason why they just did not get it was that their preconceived ideas did not match what they saw in the life of Jesus. People were looking at the events with carnal eyes rather than spiritual eyes. The next 3 verses of Isaiah 53 tell us what was evident to the world’s view.

What the World Saw When They Looked at Him

² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Isaiah 53:2-3 (NASB95)

The tender shoot and root in parched ground are evident references to the Messiah coming as a helpless infant (tender shoot). He did not arrive as the reigning monarch on a white horse with an army backing Him up. He did not come in the midst of the time of Israel’s glory but during a time when it was insignificant in the eyes of the world (parched ground).

Many times we will see paintings that depict Jesus as a tall handsome man that stood out in the crowd. That would be a good picture of King Saul but not of the Messiah. The majority of people during His day had written Him off as just another kook who had grabbed the attention of the commoners. Even the crowd that had followed eventually abandoned Him (John 6:66) and eventually it was a crowd that called for his death. He really was despised and rejected by those who just observed what was going on.

The religious leaders despised and held Him in contempt since He represented a threat to their positions of authority. The crowd rallied around Him as He rode into Jerusalem before Passover, but had railed against and forsaken Him by the end of that week.

To say that Jesus was not held in high regard (esteemed) by the majority of people of his day would be an understatement. We are seeing a resurgence of such an attitude among many people today. The attitude toward Jesus goes beyond neutrality to a definite negative regard. You can speak of religion and debate philosophies but you can't mention Jesus. He said that would happen in Matthew 10:34 and the following verses: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." These are some of the hard sayings of Jesus that divided the crowd from the true disciples.

What Was Actually Happening

⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. Isaiah 53:4-6 (NASB95)

Here we see the great misinterpretation of what was happening to Jesus on the cross. People looked at Him and concluded that He must have done something really bad and that God was punishing Him. This was the "cause and effect" mentality that was prevalent among Job's friends and is the way people view things even today. In Jesus' case, His suffering was for our sins and our transgressions. The griefs and sorrows mentioned in verse 4 were thought by people to be the result of sin. This was the case! However, the sins were not His but **ours**. They could not grasp the idea that an innocent person would suffer for the guilty, and yet, their own system of sacrifice and the observance of the Day of Atonement pointed to this very concept.

It is really amazing the details to which Isaiah prophesied. "He was pierced for our transgressions" is a reference to the fact that the Roman soldier would thrust a spear in the side of Jesus. That abuse was caused because of our sinfulness. This sinfulness is a problem of all mankind. Isaiah stated it quite clearly: "All we like sheep have gone astray . . . the iniquity of us all."

It is interesting to look at the words Isaiah used in these three verses:

Notice the parallel structure of the first part of verse 4. The word "bore" (or has born) and "carried" are essentially the same idea. The word translated "griefs" is normally translated "sickness" "or disease." The word translated as "sorrows" could also mean "pain." For emphasis, Isaiah stated the same truth twice. The translators chose the alternative words of "griefs" and "sorrows" since these seem to be more related to "spiritual" maladies; however, the alternatives of disease and pain seem to fit better with the word "healed" used in the latter part of verse 5. Some will argue that the work of the Messiah on the cross was limited to spiritual maladies and has no application to physical sickness and physical healing. Others will argue that it applies to body, soul, and spirit.

We can see a progressive structure in the second part of this verse in that He was stricken (hit) and smitten (hit hard). To the casual observer it appeared that God was doing this to Him. The result was that He was brought very low - afflicted.

In verse five we see the word "wounded" or "pierced" depending on which translation you have. That word carries a multitude of meanings: profaned, desecrated, defiled, and violated. That is not a pretty picture. Why did this happen? Because of our transgressions or our violating, defiling, desecrating, and profaning the principles and commandments and laws of God. The parallel idea in verse five is that He was wounded for transgression AND bruised for iniquities. What we have is a similar idea expressed (for emphasis) in two different ways. The word translated bruised (or crushed) can also be translated as "broken." Now, let jump forward

some 700 year and hear the words of Jesus at the Last Supper in reference to the bread. From 1 Corinthians 11:24 we see

He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Do you think Jesus had this prophecy of Isaiah in mind in His choice of words that night?

In the second part of verse five we again see a progression of actions. He was chastened or disciplined and that progressed to scourging or stripes. The results are also given in a progressive structure: peace or well-being progresses to healing.

Not to belabor the point, but verse six also shown parallelism in the first part of the verse. Going astray and doing things our own way are similar ideas. Both these are viewed by God as iniquity or sin. We see in the second part of verse six what God did with this iniquity. The sin and the punishment for that sin was piled upon Jesus. We learn from the writings of Paul that He became the sin or iniquity that we might become the righteousness that characterized Who He Is. How Did the Events Appear?

⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? ⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. Isaiah 53:7-9 (NASB95)

Many people thought Isaiah was writing about the nation of Israel and yet we see from this side of the cross how clearly this prophecy refers to the trial of Jesus. Though the arrest and trial of our Lord were unfair (oppressive), He did not protest, He did not call for help. The analogy was the lamb being sacrificed or slaughtered. Jesus came into this world to be the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Isaiah used several different description to paint the picture of how all this appeared to the people of the first century. There was oppression that was a result of a faulty judicial system. He was unjustly taken away (or arrested) by that system. He was unjustly "cut off" or killed by that system. What is most important is the question that Isaiah raised. Of all the people of that generation, would any of them have thought that all this happened to Jesus as a result of His taking all of that unjust abuse in our place (on our behalf) because of our abuse of, rebellion against, and disobedience of the commandments of God?

Isaiah even saw that something unusual would be associated with the burial of Jesus. Normally, such person as Jesus who lived as an itinerant and who died as a criminal would have been buried in a pauper's grave along with those who died at the same time as he did. Yet, because some recognized that He was not guilty of any violence and any other guilt intervened and He was buried in a proper manner as a "respectable" person would have been.

There are people who argue that Jesus failed in His attempt to become the leader of the Jews. They say that it all went sour and his death on the cross was **the** outcome of His efforts. This argument fails to take into account the fact that all that which happened to Jesus was fulfillment of God's will.

How Did God View All of This?

¹⁰ But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:10-12 (NASB95)

God's master plan of redemption of mankind hinged on the sacrifice of His Son, as the sinless Lamb of God. No other sacrifice would be sufficient to atone for the sins of every man. In this passage we see that though God made his life a guilt offering, yet He would see the results of His labor and that He would continue to live. He died, yet He lives. Through His sacrifice, God's purposes would succeed. This was the implementation of the victory over sin and death.

As a result of His being the ultimate offering for guilt, those who put their trust in Him and His offering of Himself on their behalf have become His descendants. These are no longer of the seed of Adam but are of the seed of the Second Adam.

The penalty of sin must be paid. We are told that the wages of sin is death. Here we see that what Jesus did was accepted as the payment for that penalty of sin. In other words, God's righteous requirements were satisfied in the atoning work of Jesus.

The only way we can become satisfying to God is by our identifying with Jesus and accepting His payment for sin on our behalf. What He did for us was totally sufficient.