

Isaiah 53:7-12 Pierced for Our Transgressions (2)

T: See the perfection of the work of Christ on the cross.

A: Never consider any other door to hope.

v 11

▲ “I want both of you to stay behind at the end of the class”. My heart sank. I was only 11 at the time, but I was looking down the barrel of my first (and I think only) detention.

The crime? Putting a toy robot inside the schoolteacher’s desk. It was a childish schoolboy prank, but both of us (me and my accomplice Rohan) had ruined the lesson and there was no doubt we were guilty.

For the rest of the lesson I couldn’t take in any World War 1 History, my mind was filled with shame and guilt, remorse, and something else.... Fear. You see the teacher wasn’t just my history teacher, he was one of my best friend’s dads. I’d enjoyed table fellowship with him and his whole family after school on several occasions. And I was convinced that this stupid action had put me in his bad books once and for all. I’d blown it. How could I ever recover?

Well last week we started a two part series in what I said was one of the most beautiful, Christ-focused, astonishing passages of the Old Testament. It perfectly predicts the sufferings of Jesus.

But its message was first given to people well before Jesus Christ died on the cross. The prophet Isaiah was speaking to a people 7C earlier who were staring down the barrel of a serious punishment. The Babylonian Exile which eventually happened in 597BC. They were going to be thrown out of the land and carried off into a strange land, because of the way they had turned their back on God and followed other gods.

In the first 39 chapters of the book, Isaiah mixes history with prophecy as he looks at the sins of the people, and anticipates the punishment that will come, though a small subsection of the people (a remnant) will be saved through the coming judgement.

But in chapter 40 the perspective has changed, and he’s now looking beyond the exile to the hope that they can look forward to, a hope which widens out to cosmic eternal proportions.

▲ So a little bit like my History teacher reassuring me that though punishment was going to come, it wasn’t final, and I hadn’t blown it, and my school career, and my relationship with him hadn’t been ruined forever... God reassures the people through Isaiah that the relationship wouldn’t be irrevocably damaged. And that’s because God was going to do all the mending from his side, and he would do it through an individual codenamed in these passages as “The Servant”.

But here’s something about the servant that we never would have guessed. And this is the big surprise... His success is going to be in his suffering...

We saw last time, that his sufferings are going to be...

1) Apparently in contradiction: v13-15 of the previous chapter, successful v13 and yet appalling in appearance v14.

2) Met with non-recognition (v1-3) because most people will not be impressed by him (v3) – low esteem.

3) but for those to whom it’s revealed by God, there’s a moment of recognition, like when we finally see both sides of an optical illusion: v4- Ah! these sufferings are explained by substitution (v4-6) because this servant is suffering instead of others. He’s suffering the effects and penalty of sin on his own back in the place of sinners. His death is indeed ugly in its horror, yet it’s beautiful in its rescue as he steps in place of sinners and dies their death penalty. (▲optical illusion)

That’s why we need Isaiah 53, so that when this suffering servant comes on the scene, we don’t turn away in revulsion, considering him a nothing, but we “get it”- Ah! he’s pierced for our transgressions, he’s crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brings us peace is on HIM!

Putting it simply, Isaiah writes all this so that when the suffering servant comes on the scene, we don't just see an ugly death, we also see a beautiful open doorway to life and rescue and hope.

And the thing is that this Servant HAS come on the scene. In first century Palestine, a man walked the earth who took up our infirmities and carried our diseases (Matthew 8:17), a man who as he was being arrested said he was being "numbered with the transgressors" (Luke 22:37), and who (says one of his closest friends) had "no deceit in his mouth", and yet he "himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

And as this Easter time, we hold Isaiah 53 and 53 up to Jesus Christ we see the most amazing doorway to hope opened up for us. We see that even if we feel we've blown it one too many times, and feel we could never get back into God's good books, he himself has done all the mending from his side.

So as we look at the final two paragraphs/stanzas of this amazing chapter, let's see two more things about his suffering, with a lesson for us each time.

Paragraph 4: The sufferings are ... MARKED BY SELF-SUBMISSION

What do I mean by that? Look with me at this suffering sacrificial lamb v7. Last time we were the sheep going astray, but he's taken our place and he's heading to the slaughter.

And he goes silently. Not because he doesn't know what's happening- (like the sheep queuing up happily at the abattoir door to be turned into lamb kebabs). No this lamb knows what's happening and he goes willingly. Alec Motyer translates the reflexive verb in v7 like this:

"He let himself be brutalised, and himself accepted humiliation".

This lamb knows exactly what's going to happen- he goes willingly: The sufferings are ... marked by self-submission. It's also there in v12. "He poured out his life unto death"

▲ Let's go back to the classroom where Rohan and I faced our punishment. We did get a detention, and I survived, and my teacher, Mr Emms was still friendly, and it wasn't the end of the world.

But to change the story, just consider for a moment that someone could have stepped into my place and taken that detention for me.

That is what this suffering servant is doing for us. We've seen it in many phrases in v4-6, we also see it in v8.

So I say to Mr Emms, "I want a substitute to be punished for me, and his name is Charles". (Not Charles Newcombe, but Charles H, who was one of the other 2 Charles in the classroom that day).

"Hang on", says Charles H. "I'm not going to do it, I've got a piano lesson and I don't want to miss that to do your detention".

Well the substitution cannot work. Let me explain why...

There are many things that are serious about sin, but one of them is the fact that we do it willingly. When I gossip, or lie, or am lazy, I choose to do it. And it's horrible, but that's how it is. I'm fundamentally flawed on the inside at the point of my will, I choose to sin. With regard to our illustration when I put that robot in the death I was in full control of my faculties, and I did it willingly.

And you see I can't have someone represent me as my substitute if they don't go willingly- if their will isn't involved. [And this actually explains to us why although the people of the Old Testament enjoyed the benefits of forgiveness when they sacrificed an animal, Isaiah had the insight to see (as Hebrews 10:4) tells us many years later that the it is impossible for the blood of goats and bulls to take away sins]. A goat or lamb gets shoved into the place of sacrifice, but this Servant went willingly.

"He let himself be brutalised and himself accepted humiliation".

So as in our little classroom picture a substitute who goes against his will cannot substitute for me. That's the first qualification for my substitute- he has to be willing.

But nor can a guilty substitute take my place. look at v9.

▲ Suppose back in the classroom, my mate Rohan hears the conversation with Charles H and says, "OK I'll take the punishment for him". Well Mr Emms is going to say, "No you will not, you've got a detention of your own to sit!"

For a penalty to be taken by someone else (what the theologians call penal substitution), the substitute needs to be:

- 1) Willing. (so that he can substitute for me at the point of my fallen will). This rules out an animal sacrifice- it has to be a human.
- 2) Innocent (so that he is not suffering for his own sins)- well that rules out all other human in history except one.

And 3rd) we could add to this, that this perfect human willing sacrifice needs to be God. We touched on this last time- It would be unjust for God to punish an innocent third party, even if they are willing and innocent.

But wonder of wonders. There is a servant who is 100% human, 100% divine, 100% willing, and 100% perfect (v9). He perfectly opens the door to life and hope. Jesus Christ.

And how do we know the servant is him? Well v9, there are two tiny details which seem to make no little sense in their original context, but which 700 years make perfect sense when we see Jesus was crucified between two wicked men, and when a rich man Joseph of Arimathea provided a grave for him. These little details act crosshairs on a map to pinpoint Jesus of Nazareth.

The servants sufferings... are marked by self submission.

So the application:

☞ Do you see the perfect work of Jesus on the Cross.

That is to say, do you see that Jesus perfectly qualifies to take away your sin? v8. For the transgression of my people he was punished.

☞ If you are not a Christian do you see that God has mended the relationship from his side, and you can be perfectly forgiven if you will but turn to Jesus Christ as your ruler and rescuer? The door to forgiveness, despite all the things you have done wrong lies open before you. We're going to talk about going through that door in the next point, but for now, do you see it lies open. For failures. For sinners.

☞ But for those who have turned to Christ, we need to see the perfection of this work too.

There are times in our Christian lives when we get pretty wobbly and discouraged. Times when (perhaps like Israel felt), we've think we've blown it, and will never enjoy fellowship with God. Times when we feel that God may tolerate us for the rest of our lives, but surely he will do so (as it were) through gritted teeth.

Well does it help at this point to see Jesus in Jerusalem going innocently and willingly to the cross? He wanted to be there, he did it deliberately, at great cost. As we've just sung:

See Him there upon the hill;
Hear the scorn and laughter.
Silent as a lamb He waits,
Praying to the Father.
See the King (who made the sun,
And the moon and shining stars),
Let the soldiers hold and nail Him down,
So that He could save them.

See the King...let the soldiers nail him down, so that he cd save them.
Extraordinary! What sacrifice, what love.

One of the places I go when I see my sin, or know my weakness is to the excellence and absolute perfection of Jesus' work on the cross, in passages like this, or Romans 3, or the gospel narratives of the cross, or for me especially the book of Hebrews. It shows me that our Lord and Saviour's work is perfect in every regard.

It points to me a wide open door into the presence of God- the cross of Christ. And not only does it give me great comfort, but it makes me wonder why I would ever turn to any other doorway for hope.

Well let's move onto our final paragraph/stanza in the song: v10-12. It's the longest, but it's the most triumphant.

In this section, we see that The sufferings of the servant are:

Paragraph 5) EFFECTIVE IN SURE SALVATION (v10-12)

v10

That's a staggering verse, it tells us that the work of salvation was not done grudgingly, but God was pleased to crush Jesus for our sins, and it was done as a guilt offering (like one of the sacrifices in Leviticus 5), where there was an exact equivalence between the sacrificial animal and the sin that had been committed.

It's also telling us how we should respond to this section. We should treat Jesus as our sin bearing substitute, and rely on him for our sins to be lifted off (more on that in a moment).

But look at the emphasis in the verses on what happens after the suffering.

- v10- prolong his days: there's a future beyond the suffering because God is using him to achieve something.
- It's clearest in v11- see the light of life and be satisfied.
- And v12 because he has poured out his life unto death (12b), God will vindicate him and put him in the highest place. v12a

So after his suffering there will be light.

If this suffering servant only suffered, well he could still remove our sin and be a guilt offering for us, but we wouldn't necessarily know if had worked. There would be a lot of doubt over whether he really is atoning for our sins, or whether he is just another guilty man dying.

But v11 after he has suffered, he will see (or will see the light of life) and be satisfied. God has put a massive stamp of approval on the servant and said, he has done the job. After death life.

▲ It's always a relief when I put my debit card in the keypad in a shop, and after a few seconds the reader says "card approved". Phew, the payment has been processed, and I can have the goods.

It's a silly illustration, but on a far richer and more grand scale, the resurrection proves (amongst many other things- and that would be a whole new sermon series) that the work of the cross has been effective.

It worked!

And that's why this section is packed with words about what the suffering achieved.

Look at the success words in these verses...

v10. The Lord makes his life an offering for sin.

v12. HE bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

BUT ESP v11. My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

▲ Justify. It's to be declared in the right, not guilty. You borrow a friend's bike, and you have a bit of an altercation with a lamp post, and you are OK, but the bike has had a bit of a scrape and lost some of its shiny red paintwork. You give it back to its owner with an apology, and he says "It's OK. You're alright". He's justifying you.

Though you were in the wrong, you are now in the right.

v11. By his knowledge. Justify. Declare righteous.

This is the result of the Servant's work:

The sufferings are effective in sure salvation.

☞ So a final application...

Do you trust the perfect work of Christ on the cross?

We've seen that Jesus' death and resurrection is the doorway to life. The people of Israel were shown hope in the face of sin and suffering, we too are shown hope in the face of our sin and suffering.

And if the previous point showed that Jesus death is perfect in theory, this section shows that it actually brings salvation and a mended relationship with God in practice.

So the door of hope lies before us in Christ. The question is will we actually come through that door if we never have? Will we bow before the servant who in 52:13 is triply exalted. Raised, lifted up, exalted. Will we turn to him, will we ask him for this salvation?

Some here this evening have never come to Christ. For you, you've always seen the doorway to hope in other places. RELATONSHIPS, ACADEMIA, even religion. But these are dead ends.

▲ In my parents house there is one old door that has a door on one side and a brick wall on the other. (lived in that house 25 years, dead end!) That door isn't going anywhere. And nor is any other door.

Your life is guilty. You have rebelled against your maker, and you know it. And in a week where we have been reminded by the tragic events of the plane crash in the Alps that death is a reality, you are not ready to meet your maker. You have on your shoulders a weight that will carry you down to eternal death and condemnation.

But there is a door marked "the Cross of Christ", and it is the only doorway that actually leads anywhere. It leads to forgiveness and relationship with God. Why? because of the sufferings of the Servant.

Predicted 700 years ago, perfect in every regard to take your punishment off your back and onto the back of Jesus.

Will you trust in Jesus Christ? Will you turn to him alone as the one who justifies you. Will you join the many of verse 11?

And for those of us who are trusting Jesus.

Will we do two things?

☞ 1) Will we get some spiritual graffiti, and get out our invisible spray can and write all over the other doors which offer us hope a massive "DEAD END" ...

Why looking for hope in other places. Especially at the door marked CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY. Is Jesus death insufficient? Does it need bolstering and firming up, by you doing Christian things, coming to church, having a quiet time, bring friends to RLRL.

Joy can be found there, friends can be found there, but HOPE is already achieved in Christ.

By all mean bring friends, but don't think your status with God is somehow impaired. God may have another plan for them.

☞2) Will we start enjoying living life on the other side of the door?

Tell yourself verse 6 over and over again. I am right w God now. Justified. Not because I'm any good, but because Christ is.

I have peace with God

This the power of the Cross, Christ became sin for us.

Took the blame, bore the wrath, we stand forgiven at the cross.

If we've come through Christ, we stand on the other side of the door, forgiven in Christ. Isn't that good news?

Everything, EVERYTHING, is now OK. WE are free.

Let's pray. 55:1. Without Cost.