



New Covenant
BIBLE CHURCH

Bearing the Awesome Weight of Sin

The Power of the Cross #2

Isaiah 53:4-6

David Sunday

March 24, 2013

My Jesus, fair, was pierced by thorns
By thorns grown from the fall.
Thus He who gave the curse was torn
To end that curse for all.

My Jesus, meek, was scorned by men,
By men in blasphemy.
"Father, forgive their senseless sin!"
He prayed, for them, for me.

My Jesus, king, was torn by nails,
By nails of cruel men.
And to His cross, as grace prevailed,
God pinned my wretched sin.

My Jesus, pure, was crushed by God
By God, in judgment just.
The Father grieved, yet turned His rod
On Christ, made sin for us.

My Jesus strong, shall come to reign,
To reign in majesty--
The Lamb arose, and death is slain.
Lord, come in victory!

O love divine, O matchless grace--
That God should die for men!
With joyful grief I lift my praise,
Abhorring all my sin, adoring only Him.

(My Jesus Fair by Chris Anderson & Greg Habegger)

Lord Jesus, we pray that You would increase our abhorrence for all our sin and our adoration of You as we open Your Word together. Lord, we will forever thank You for Your cross. For all eternity we will never stop saying, "Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain." But for all eternity, we will never fully understand the depth and the meaning of it all. Lord, as we hear words that are very familiar to us, we pray that our familiarity would not deceive us into thinking we have comprehended them. But rather lead us more deeply into worship, adoration,

confidence and trust in You. Thank You that—through our union with You—all that belongs to Christ becomes ours. We love you, Lord. In His name we pray. Amen.

We call Palm Sunday ‘The triumphal entry’ because Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and heard crowds shouting, “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*” (Matthew 21:9). It was a triumphal but also a tearful entry for Jesus because He knew He would be rejected and despised and that the cross was looming on the horizon. During His days on earth, Jesus thought more about the giving of His life than about the living of it. From passages like Isaiah 53, our Lord learned what it would mean for Him to give His life for us.

We’re going to focus on verses four through six of this great passage and seek to follow the counsel of Charles Spurgeon who said, “Abide hard by the cross and search the mystery of His wounds.” We will never fully comprehend this mystery. Isaiah 53:4-6 gets to the heart of why Christ suffered for us—what was happening when He gave His life for us. Let’s read these profound, terrible yet beautiful verses about our salvation.

*⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds 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.*

Why did Jesus suffer? Let us search the mysteries of His wounds.

Maybe you have seen a movie called To End all Wars or read the book on which it is based—Through the Valley of the Kwai. It’s a nightmarish story of how in World War II the Japanese used prisoners of war to build a military railroad through south-east Asia, across the river Kwai. At the end of one day’s work, the shovels were counted. A prison guard determined a shovel was missing. Surely some member of the work party had stolen a shovel and traded it to the Thais. The guard demanded that the thief present himself but nobody stepped forward. Enraged, the guard started shouting, “All die! All die!” Raising his rifle, he started pointing it randomly at the men in the line until finally a soldier stepped forward and said, “I did it.” The guard approached him, raised his rifle and beat the man’s head in until he died. Grief stricken and terrified, the men brought their shovels back to the camp. They counted them again and found that every shovel was there. The first count had been inaccurate. A man had given his life for his fellow prisoners. He died in their place as their substitute. But an important element is lacking—justice. No one needed to die.

That is how many people view the cross of Jesus. They see it as a tragic symbol of God's love for man but they don't see it as necessary to satisfy God's justice. Many look at the cross and see it as an inspiring example of how we are to give ourselves to God as completely as Christ and learn from Christ to repent of our sins and suffer for righteousness' sake. It is an inspiring example. But when push comes to shove they don't believe that God in Christ was bearing the just penalty for our sins on the cross. They deny what Christians have affirmed throughout the ages. They deny what John Stott powerfully affirms when he writes, "In order to save us in such a way as to satisfy Himself, God through Christ substituted Himself for us. Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice." That's not all there is to say about the gospel by any means, but that is at the heart of the gospel. If we remove that truth the gospel unravels. "Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice."

Muslims vehemently disagree with that truth. At least five times, the Qur'an declares: "No soul shall bear another's burden." It says, "If a laden soul cries out for help, not even a near relation shall share its burden." Why? Because "each man shall reap the fruit of his own deeds." Islam denies the need for the cross and it goes on to deny the fact of the cross.

Hindus, on the other hand, accept the fact that Jesus died on the cross, but they reject the idea that He actually accomplished anything through his death. For example, in 1894 Gandhi wrote: "I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher but not as the most perfect man every born. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept." Why? Because Gandhi wanted Jesus to be just like him. He wanted Jesus to be a peer or role model, but not a Savior; and certainly not his Lord.

The Holy Spirit gave Isaiah the prophet eyes to see the meaning of the cross 700 years before it happened. For Isaiah, the cross is a fact in history, so vivid and real that he writes to us as if we were there when they crucified our Lord. Because we were. Isaiah wants us to see this cross was necessary for us. Jesus was not being punished for something He had done. He was taking our place at the cross. He was our substitute.

A substitute is someone who does for us what we must otherwise do for ourselves. I was scheduled to preach this morning. Had I woken up sick, I would have had two choices. I would have either had to find a substitute who could do for me what I was supposed to do or I would have to come and preach while being sick. As our substitute, Jesus accomplished for us what we must otherwise do for ourselves. We either must trust Jesus to do the things for us that Isaiah describes or we have to do them ourselves. As we come to these three verses, let's ask three questions:

1. Why do we need a substitute?
2. What did our substitute accomplish in our place?
3. How can we benefit from the substitution of Jesus Christ?

Why We Need a Substitute

Verse four begins with the word ‘surely’, emphasizing the unexpected. There is something solemn and very profound that is going to be stated. Isaiah pictures the people looking at God’s Servant stricken with some awful disease. The word ‘stricken’ is a word that was used of leprosy when it fell upon a person. They saw that He was “*smitten by God and afflicted.*” Surely He was being smitten by God, stricken and afflicted.

But we misunderstood the purpose of God striking, smiting and afflicting His Son. We thought it was because of something horrible He had done. We looked at Jesus—in all His sufferings, sorrows and grief—and hid our faces from Him. We were ashamed of Him and did not esteem Him. We thought, “He is guilty and getting what He deserves.” But Isaiah tells us He is getting what we deserved.

The emphasis in verse four is between the pronouns “He” and “we.” Jesus was brought low by God and humiliated because He was suffering for us what we otherwise must suffer. Here Isaiah focuses on our subjective experience of guilt. He will get to the objective reality of our guilt in verse five. But in verse four it’s as if Isaiah is saying, “Not only is sin bad, morally repulsive and the cause of our objective guilt, but it also brings misery into our lives. It brings depression, sorrow and grief. Sin is a heavy weight to bear. It weighs the world down.”

So we try to deny sin and evade responsibility for it. Friedrich Nietzsche—who was not a Christian—was at least honest about his own attempts to evade guilt. He wrote an imaginary dialogue between his conscience and himself that went like this:

"I did that," says my memory.
"I cannot have done that," says my pride.
Eventually...my memory yields.

My memory gives way to my pride because I cannot face the burden of what I have done. My pride will not allow me to face up to and bear my guilt. I would drown in grief and sorrow if I had to face up to everything I had thought, said and done. “*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...*” I need Him to be my Substitute. I cannot bear that burden.

Back in the English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer eloquently captured the awesome weight of our sin when he wrote this in The Book of Common Prayer:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men:
We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry of these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable.

We cannot bear the awesome weight of our sins. It is intolerable. We would be crushed if we had to remember forever the grievous shame of our guilt. Yet that is precisely what some of us carry now. Even professing Christians who would sing,

Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

(There is Power in the Blood by Lewis E. Jones, 1899)

Many of us have come to church bearing a weight on our shoulders—an awareness of our sin, guilt and shame. Sadly, that is precisely what some of you are doing with the sins of others who have sinned against you. You are carrying around the grievous remembrance of what others have done or failed to do toward you. You are nursing that offense and finding the burden intolerable. And so you lash out at others, trying to make some other poor sinner become the sacrificial victim and pay for their guilt and the pain they have caused you. Do you see what a heavy weight sin is to bear? What an intolerable burden and grievous thing it is to remember our sin.

Isaiah is telling us that Christ alone can bear that awesome weight.

And oh to see the pain written on Your face
Bearing the awesome weight of sin
And every bitter thought, every evil deed
Crowning Your bloodstained brow

This the power of the cross
Christ became sin for us
Took the blame, bore the wrath
We stand forgiven at the cross

(The Power of the Cross by Bethany Dillon & Matt Hammitt)

He bore the awesome weight of the sin of the world. Isaiah says that Christ has 'surely' done so. I believe that every bit of joy, gladness and goodness we experience in this life is because the Redeemer bore the griefs and sorrows of the world. Think about all the joys we have—the breath that we're able to breath right now, the shelter we experience, the warmth of friendships, the fun and peace. Isn't it amazing that in a fallen world we have so much joy and gladness? This is far from hell. This is a good world—created by a good Creator—and we're still tasting so much of the goodness.

The only way sinners can taste that goodness is because a Redeemer bore our griefs and our sorrows. We call that common grace—every human being benefits from what Jesus did. But if we have not received Jesus as our Saving Substitute, if our guilt has not been transferred on Him and we have not trusted Him to take that guilt away; there is coming a day when the intolerable burden of our sin will crush us forever. And the grievous remembrance of our shame will never leave us. We call that hell. Either we must trust in our Savior to bear our griefs and sorrows—to take away that intolerable burden—or one day we must forever bear it ourselves.

If you do not throw the weight of the burden of your sin and the sins that have been done against you on Jesus, there will be an intolerable weight crushing you. Praise God that—whether or not you have felt the weight of sin—there is One Who has stood in your place and borne that awesome weight if you will trust in Him.

What our Substitute Accomplished in Our Place

We move now from the subjective experience of sin and shame to the objective reality of what God has done for us in Christ to bear the full brunt of every evil we have done. We see in Isaiah 53:5 what every bitter thought, all the wicked words and selfish attitudes cost Him. In verse four we see that He bore an intolerable burden and in verse five, He pays an incalculable debt. The first word of verse five is ‘but,, emphasizing a contrast between Him and us. He was not being punished for His own sins and failures, but for ours.

There are three dreadful realities that are brought to the surface in verse five. We cannot sweep these under the rug of the floor of our lives. There is the reality of transgression, iniquity and enmity with God:

1. **Transgression** is the fact that we have willfully and deliberately rebelled against God’s law. We have spurned the authority of our Commanding Officer, revolted against our Boss and aligned ourselves as co-conspirators in treason against our King. We have disobeyed our Loving Father and are transgressors.
2. **Iniquity** refers to the fact that our nature is perverted and bent toward evil. Our hearts are like a contaminated spring and everything that flows from our sinful hearts is polluted with perverseness. We who are accustomed to doing evil cannot do good. Everything we do is tainted by the perversity of our sin.
3. **Enmity** means because of our transgressions of His holy law and our nature which is perverted and bent toward evil, we are not at peace with God. The last person in the universe you want to be an enemy of is God. But sin brings enmity, strife, between us and God, and until we are reconciled with Him, there can be no lasting peace for us. There is no way we can be whole, complete, personally fulfilled, living in harmony with others or secure in our relationship with God until God’s justice is satisfied through the payment of our sins.

Do you know what’s alarming? We don’t think any of that is a big deal. We’re not troubled by transgression, iniquity, rebellion or enmity with God. We’re comfortable being at war with God. We actually enjoy iniquity and think it’s normal to fight against His authority in our lives. We take pride in saying, “I did it my way.” We’re not troubled by our sin. We can go home, eat and sleep as if there is no problem—no great burden or incalculable debt.

One of my favorite stanzas in all of Christian hymnody comes from Thomas Kelly's great hymn 'Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted.' It comes from these verses in Isaiah 53. The second verse of the hymn says:

Ye who think of sin but lightly,
Nor suppose the evil great,
Here [at the cross] may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark [pay attention] the Sacrifice appointed!
See Who bears the awful load!
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,
Son of Man, and Son of God.

(Stricken, Smitten & Afflicted by Thomas Kelly; 1804)

What did it cost Him to pay that incalculable debt? If you want to know how seriously God takes your rebellion, crookedness and enmity with Him, look at Jesus on the cross. If you want to know how much God loves you despite your rebellion, enmity and transgression, look at Jesus on the cross. He was wounded and pierced for our transgressions. The word 'pierced' is also used in Isaiah 51 when it speaks metaphorically of "piercing Rahab the dragon" (verse nine). That's what happened to Jesus—He was pierced violently, painfully for our rebellion. He was 'crushed'—an intense word meaning 'pulverized'—for our iniquities. "*Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace*" (Isaiah 53:5). Think of His flesh made raw with blood-red stripes as the whip was lashed upon Him.

This is Isaiah's description of what Paul meant when He said, "[God] *did not spare his own Son...*" (Romans 8:32). There were no discounts given to Jesus when it came to paying that incalculable debt. God did not spare Him or hold back His awful rod. He gave Him up and abandoned Him for us all. In the words of Ray Ortlund, "Jesus became the object of God's holy, wise, perfectly assessed, fully warranted wrath against our sins to satisfy the demands of God's justice." It's what it cost Him to pay the incalculable debt.

Praise God for the last line of verse five: "*With his wounds we are healed.*" He did not pay or pour out His soul in vain. He accomplished the healing of our sin-sick, wayward souls. Not only the penalty of our sins but all the dire consequences. He brings healing, 'shalom', peace, wholeness back into our lives when we submit to Him as our King. How marvelous and wonderful that the wounds of millions of sinners can be healed by looking at the wounds of One Who died in our place. Praise God that He was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19), not counting peoples' transgressions against them (Romans 4:7-8) because He was imputing our transgressions to Christ. Christ became our Substitute, paying in full the penalty we otherwise would be paying forever in hell.

Someone must pay the penalty for your sins—either you or Jesus. God in Christ was satisfied. Jesus cried out on the cross, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). Those are three words no one will ever hear or speak in hell.

It will never be finished there. Praise God that in the wounds of Jesus Christ there is ample wealth to pay for all your sins and heal you of sin's deadly disease if you will put your trust in Him.

How We Can Enter into the Substitution of Christ

Isaiah 53:6 says, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way..."* If you were to make a chart of these three verses showing what we have done and what God has done, on the "What we have done" side you would see—verse four—we misunderstood Him, did not cooperate or have sympathy with Him. We looked at Him and thought He was getting what he deserved. We totally missed the point of what Jesus came into the world to do. In verse five we see we've contributed our transgressions, iniquities, enmity and rebellion. Then in verse six we see we've deliberately wandered and gone astray from His ways. We've turned to our own way. None of those are positive things. They're all sinful contributions to the equation. *"All we like sheep have gone astray..."* Sin is a universal problem which includes all humanity. When they go astray from their shepherd, sheep are in great danger. We've all gone astray like a great herd of sheep and have done so personally. Sin is a very personal thing. *"We have turned—every one—to his own way..."* Each of us is fond of our own unique way to express our sin.

But look at the last phrase: *"The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* Isaiah is taking us back to the great drama that was enacted on the Day of Atonement each year for the Israelites. Leviticus 16 describes what took place on that day, how the people would bring a sacrificial goat to the priest. The priest would lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess all the iniquities, transgressions and sins of the people. He would do so with specificity. Then he would transfer the sins of the people onto the head of the goat and send it into the wilderness where it could never find its way back—banished forever. The goat was the substitute. He did what the sinner must otherwise do. Either the goat would be banished forever from the presence of God—guilty and condemned—or the sinner must be banished forever from the presence of God. That's where we get the word 'scapegoat.'

On the cross, God was taking all the sins of everyone who would ever believe on Jesus and laying them on His holy head. Think about God the Father saying to Christ the Son, "You are Peter, the denier. You are Paul the blasphemer, persecutor, insolent opponent. You are Rahab the harlot. You are David the adulterer." Name specifically all the things it would be grievous for you to remember and the incredible, intolerable burden of your sins. If you believe on Jesus, God was laying your iniquity on Him. Jesus was becoming your Scapegoat and God was saying to Him, "Here, You take all the sin and awful weight of sin and bear it away to hell. Cast it into the depths of the sea where it can never be dredged up again. Remove it from My people as far as the east is from the west so I can say to them, *'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more'*" (Jeremiah 31:34).

*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*

Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity... (Psalm 32:1-2)

The Substitute has taken that from you. There is a great difference between this Scapegoat and all others. He's the only One Who came back alive from the dead. Gloriously alive! Sin no longer has any dominion over Him. He Who died has died to sin once for all (Romans 6:10) so that we might live. The penalty has been paid in full. Jesus reigns so grace can reign through righteousness.

How can you know that you are a part of the "us all" at the end of verse six? How can you know He has taken your sin and become your Substitute?

1. **Agree with God.** Say, "You are right. I have gone astray and rebelled. My heart is perverse and my ways have brought enmity between us, God. My anger, bitterness, grief and sorrow are not there because You have been unfair with me but because I have rebelled against You. Agree with God about who you are and believe what He has done to take away the intolerable burden of your sin.
2. **Imitate God.** Isaiah says that the Lord has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all, now you do the same. By faith say,

I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all, and frees us from the accursed load;
I bring my guilt to Jesus, to wash my crimson stains
White in His blood most precious, till not a stain remains.

(I Lay My Sins on Jesus by Horatius Boner, 1843)

Lay your sins on Jesus. Take the greatest sins you've ever committed—the worst things you can remember doing—as well as any sin so small you would be tempted to think you could handle it yourself and lay it all on Jesus. Lay your goodness on Jesus also—the things about yourself that you trust in and think would be good enough to make you right with God—and say, "No, I lay that all on Jesus. I lay all my self-righteousness on Jesus." Trust His wounds to heal you and His blood to cleanse you. Athanasius said, "It is only on a Cross that a man dies with his hands stretched out wide" as if to say, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden*" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus will bear the awesome weight of sin, giving you rest and bearing that awful load Himself.

Friends, would you be willing to do that for the people in your life who have sinned against you? I think that's a real test of whether you've tasted the freedom and joy of sins forgiven—whether you're willing to forgive someone else who has sinned against you. If you are saying to someone, "You're going to bear that load," then you're never going to forget that grief. It's a strong indication that you're not really tasting the freedom and fullness of the forgiveness of your sins.

I want to read something that pastor Ray Ortlund said to his church. He asked,

“What would it be like to feel forgiven? To walk through this world, in our homes, at our office, in church... to live as forgiven people? To change the subject from what's wrong with someone else to what's wonderful about Christ, and also, what's admirable about that person for the sake of Christ.”

What would it be like to feel forgiven? To not just say it but really believe it and take that load and throw it on Jesus? The song, Amazing Love, is simply trying to describe the joy of what it feels like to be forgiven. Jesus is here to take your awful load and lift the burden of the grief and sorrow that sin has brought into your life. He was pierced for your transgressions and crushed for your iniquities. He was chastised to bring you peace with God and bring us peace with one another. Lay your sins on Jesus and rejoice in your Savior for His gift of forgiveness.

I'm forgiven because You were forsaken,
I'm accepted, You were condemned.
I am alive and well, Your spirit is within
me,
Because You died and rose again.

That You, my King, should die for me?
Amazing love,
I know it's true.
It's my joy to honor You,
In all I do, I honor You.

Amazing love,
How can it be

(Amazing Love by Chris Tomlin)

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