
From Isaiah 53

⁴ He suffered the things we should have suffered.
He took on himself the pain that should have been ours.
But we thought God was punishing him.
We thought God was wounding him and making him suffer.
⁵ But the servant was pierced because we had sinned.
He was crushed because we had done what was evil.
He was punished to make us whole again. His wounds have healed us.

John 19:17-18a

¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him

What picture do you have of Jesus – the man who walked this earth some 2000 years ago, and without a doubt is the most influential person in human history... How do you ‘picture’ Jesus...?

Some Christian artists today portray Jesus as a jaunty, grinning figure. Posters, paintings, and figurines depict Jesus as smiling or even laughing. None of the Gospel accounts describe Jesus laughing, though many scholars note that His parables reflect an underlying sense of humour. Jesus was no jokester, but His words and interactions with people reveal that He possessed a sharp wit.

As we seek to ‘picture Jesus’ we may remember that Jesus experienced the fullness of joy (see Ps. 45:7; Heb. 1:9). But the prophet Isaiah’s portrait of Israel’s promised Messiah, however, describes another important quality. This picture depicted not a jolly Messiah but one who would be a “man of sorrows” who was “familiar with suffering” (Isa. 53:3). The Hebrew word translated “sorrows” in Isaiah 53:3 was used in other contexts to refer to physical or mental pain. In Isaiah 53, it seems to speak not only of the physical suffering of Israel’s servant (described in vv. 5–10) but also of emotional anguish. This grief was partly due to Christ’s awareness of the suffering of others. He lamented over the fate of Jerusalem and wept at the tomb of Lazarus (Luke 13:34; John 11:35).

Jesus also experienced deep, personal anguish prior to His crucifixion. While in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matt. 26:38). It might seem as if Jesus were asking the disciples to help Him through these difficult hours. In reality, He was inviting them to stay alert with Him for their own benefit (Luke 22:46).

How do you 'picture Jesus'? The prophet Isaiah says, "4 He suffered the things we should have suffered. He took on himself the pain that should have been ours."

As we listen to this word of Jesus taking pain upon Himself, and bearing our 'sickness', the word the prophet uses for "sickness" can mean a variety of illnesses. Isaiah is speaking of sin sickness. But he also refers to the removal of the consequences of this sin sickness. Jesus has taken the debt of sin upon Himself, and carries it as His own, i.e. "to look at it and feel it as one's own (Lev. 5:1, 17)."

The emphasis is on the pronoun "He." "He bore" our griefs. He lifted up and carried away our griefs and sorrows. "He lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain" (NET). The divine Substitute takes the sin in its consequences that belong to us, lifts them up, i.e. loaded them upon Himself, and carries them away.

What are the consequences of our sins? We live in a day when people want the freedom to do as they please, but they do not want the consequences of their choices. You are free to choose, but you are not free to choose your consequences.

How do you 'picture Jesus'?

The listeners to Isaiah's poem did not want to face the consequences of their sins. They pointed their finger and said we regard Him as being punished by God with this loathsome and horrible disease. They looked upon the punishment as the punishment for His own sins. They measured the sin of the Sufferer by the sufferings that He endured. They reasoned like Job's friends, He must have been suffering for His own great sins. They saw Him as the one stricken with a "hateful, shocking disease."

He was a marked man. God singled Him out for punishment. God had both "stricken," "smitten" and "afflicted" Him. He was "bowed down" by the hand of God. He was "struck down by God" is the alternate reading in NASB. God afflicted Him with the suffering. God's vengeance appeared to have fallen upon Him. There is no record of Jesus having any physical illness. He was healthy. However, our sins burned like the fire of a hot raging fever in His soul. He bore the penalty of our sins. There was nothing wrong with Him. The problem is with us. We are the guilty sinners.

Our problem is spiritual. The "transgressions" and "iniquities" is evidence that the law of God has been broken. You can't miss the emphasis Isaiah makes: "transgressions" (v. 5, 8), "iniquities" (v. 5, 6, 11), "wicked" (v. 9), "sin" (v. 12). We need spiritual healing. "Healing" in verse five is a metaphor for forgiveness.

The punishment of Jesus Christ was vicarious. The dictionary definition of the word is "performed or endured by one person substituting for another; fulfilled

by the substitution of the actual offender with some other person or thing. Vicarious punishment. 2. Acting in place of someone or something else"

The apostle Peter recognised this great truth when he stated Christ "Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds we were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

The Divine Substitute bore the sins of those who rightly deserved the punishment of God. He was the innocent sufferer dying for the guilty. He was suffering for our transgressions. Isaiah changes the figure from that of the sick man to one who is wounded.

Observe the strong verbs Isaiah uses to describe the extreme painful judgment of God on the Sufferer. "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." The thought in the word "pierced through" is a "piercing through unto death."

How do you 'picture Jesus'?

The image of a smiling Christ may be a helpful corrective for some who think that Jesus was morose or for those who believe that Christianity is depressing. But we must recognize that Christ's suffering, not His laughter, was the means of our justification. Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before him" (Heb. 12:2). He embodied both sorrows and joy. And this is truly 'good news' for us all...

All people have a sense of guilt for their transgressions no matter how hard they try to suppress it. As much as we try to deny this, this is really our 'human nature'. There is always a nagging 'sense of guilt'. And so there should be. For we all are 'by nature sinful and unclean' (cf. Ps.51:5). And the only way to lose the weight of guilt is to have it removed through atonement. If you have trusted in Christ alone for salvation, you need not feel guilty before God this day, for He has paid for your sin.

This is the gospel, the good news of peace.

Our Jesus took on Himself, not only our sins and rebellion, but also the emotional distresses, the physical pains and diseases and all that resulted from the world's separation from Him. In every area of our being, spirit, soul and body, He took our destruction upon Himself. Having voluntarily laid down His life for us, He abolished the death that reigned in us, that we who believe in Him, would be raised up to live a resurrected life, now and eternally. (2 Tim 1:10, Col 3:1-3)

How do you 'picture Jesus'?

If we had stood at the trials of Jesus, seen His beatings, seen His crucifixion and sat at the foot of the cross, surely we would weep at the injustice and inhumanity of it all. However, the Scripture reveals that it was the will of God that Christ go to the cross and die for sinners (Acts 2:23; 4:28), for His death is

an atoning sacrifice that satisfied every righteous demand of the Father (Rom. 3:25; 1 Jo. 2:2). As stated previously, the Father sent, and Christ went. In the willing death of Christ, we have the Father's righteous anger displayed toward our sin as well as His love toward us, the sinner, whom He seeks to save.

How do you 'picture Jesus'? Do you know Him at work in your life...?

God's ways not our ways. The world may wonder how much real effect the ministry of Jesus and his community can have. What good is it, they wonder, to preach the gospel, sing a hymn, to pour water over a baby, to offer a bit of bread and a sip of wine, to hold the hand of the dying. What good is it, they wonder, to speak a forgiving word, to stock a food shelf, to fold hands in prayer, or to fold clothes for the homeless? Why visit the sick, comfort the grieving, negotiate a conflict, carry out a daily vocation with integrity, all in the name of Christ? The world may denigrate these seemingly humble and weak ministries of Christ's church. Yet Scripture testifies that it is precisely through such seemingly weak and foolish means that God chooses to do His work (1 Cor.1:27-31).

God's Servant brings peace to this troubled, sinful world, and, most importantly, peace with God. He's the Prince of Peace. When he was born, the angels proclaimed "Peace on earth" Faith in Jesus brings peace with God.

The Servant's suffering communicates, at one and the same time, both judgment ("the sins he bears are mine!") and also salvation ("... those sins have been dealt with on my behalf!"). God's servant has brought us a new beginning. Our text this morning ends on a note of promise. Death does not have the last word. Isaiah doesn't congratulate us on what we have done for the Lord. He calls instead, for humble contrition, a recognition of what God's Servant has done -- and is doing -- for us, not just on this Good Friday, but every day, and for eternity. Amen!