



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 53:10-12

“The Righteous Servant, Bruised but Exalted”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our theme in this series of messages is the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah. And our subject for today is the righteous servant, bruised but exalted. And we're turning again to Isaiah chapter 53 and we are looking at verse 10 through verse 12. The Righteous servant bruised but exalted. The problem of man finds its divine solution in the ministry of God's servant the Messiah. It is through him alone that we have peace. The prophet puts it this way, “By his knowledge.” That is by the knowledge of him, “shall my righteous servant justify many.” While Paul puts it in this way, “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the present moment in history it seems that men wish to look everywhere for salvation but towards heaven. Psychiatry, psychology and psycho therapy are on a roll today, but the benefits are limited to time if at all. Even Karl Jung, one the most famous of psychiatrists confessed, “I've treated many hundreds of patients, among those over thirty-five there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.

The ministry of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah of Israel is three-fold. He is a prophet who brings us the knowledge of God and man, he is a king who shall rule in

righteousness and he is a priest who makes atonement for our sins. And it is this work which stands out in the last strophe of the fourth and final song of Isaiah's Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:10 through 12. And it was probably this strophe which caused one commentator to say that this entire fourth song of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah was a symphony in be saved.

So we turn again to the event and the person of the event that is the object of the adoring gaze of multitudes. Myriads of eyes gaze at the sun, multitudes lift up their eyes to the stars, and nations of men survey the heavens every day, but there is one great event to which more look than the spectators commanded by the sun, moon, stars and heavens. That event is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ to which the saints of God through the past ages, the present body of believing men and women, and the elect angels constantly gaze in adoring gratitude. Of our salvation Peter said, “Which things the angels desire to look into,” 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 12.

So we have many with us as we think of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ in this study. That this final strophe of the fourth song of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah has to do with the Lord Jesus Christ is attested by the Lord himself who cites from it in Luke chapter 22 and verse 35 through verse 38, by Paul who refers to the verses in Romans 4:25 and by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who also refers to it in Hebrews 9:28.

A story about the Nile Press, a Christian press in Egypt before the days of Nasser comes to mind. It seems that a request came to the press from Yemenite Jews for one hundred Hebrew Bibles. The man who prepared the order sent also a New Testament in Hebrew with the shipment after offering up a prayer to God for its use. A year later another order for more Hebrew Bibles was received and this addition was written to the order, “Please also send us some copies of the little book that explains the big book.” It is the New Testament that seals the reference of Isaiah 53 to the Lord Jesus Christ the Messiah.

My prayer is the prayer of Mr. Spurgeon as we turn to the text, “Come sacred spirit now whilst we attempt to speak on these matchless themes.” And first we look at the sufferings of the servant in Isaiah 53 verse 10 and the first three clauses. And first of all, Isaiah writes about the divine side of his sufferings. He says, “And yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

The sufferings of the servant were emphasized by both our Lord and the Apostle Peter. The Lord speaking to the disciples on the Emmaus road after his resurrection sharply admonished them with, “Oh fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?” And Peter learned the lesson, for he wrote to the believers of the Diaspora reminding them that the Spirit of Christ and the prophets testified before him the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.

The premature and violent death of the servant portrayed in the two preceding verses, verses 8 and 9 of Isaiah 53 might have tempted men to think that God had left his servant in the lurch. “The innocent servant,” George Adam Smith has written, “Was put to a violent and premature death. Public apathy closed over him and the unmarked earth of a felon’s grave. It is so utter a perversion of justice, so signal a triumph of wrong over right, so final a disappearance into oblivion of the fairest life which ever lived that men might be tempted to say God has forsaken his own. And so overlooking the guilt of both Herod and Pontius Pilate as well as the malice of Caiaphas the Jewish High Priest, the prophet traces the death to the determinate counsel of God. He was the ultimate efficient cause. God willed it, Pilate, Herod and Caiaphas were responsible and guilty, but God determined that he die for sinners. It’s the mystery of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility at its clearest.”

The line, “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him,” if not carefully interpreted might imply that the Father was cruel and the servant’s death repulsive to one’s moral sensibilities. The Hebrew word translated pleased is not a word suggesting pleasure in the sense of human enjoyment. It’s a word of purpose; it says that God purposed the servant’s death, a death making possible an offering for sin or divine forgiveness. His death is no mere martyr’s death; it was an expiatory sacrifice, a satisfaction to the law of God.

It is this that our modern society finds so difficult to understand, namely that God is just and his law a representation of his righteous demand of us. In the atonement Jesus pays homage to the law of God, satisfying its demands against us by his substitutionary offering.

The human side of the matter is also stated in chapter 53 and verse 10, for he speaks about, “when he shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed.” Looking at his sufferings from our standpoint, the servant’s death is an offering for sin, a satisfaction rendered to the justice of God in our behalf. As we sometimes sing in our meetings, “His the curse, the wounds the gall, his the stripes, he bore them all, his the dying cry of pain when our sins he did sustain.”

The word rendered by offering is the word that referred to the trespass offering described in Leviticus 5 and 6. This offering was unique in its provision for compensation of the offended party beyond the expected requirements of expiation for sin and restitution for the wrong done. For example, if a person stole fifty shekels from another person, the guilty party was required to offer a sacrifice in expiation such as a ram, make restitution of the fifty shekels to the other party, and then and this was unique, add a further twenty percent, a fifth part as the Scripture puts it. Thus the offended party was actually in better condition then before the robbery.

Many Bible teachers think the trespass offering represents typically what Adam did to the race in the fall and what Christ did in repairing the trespass. Adam robbed God of

the obedience he deserved from men and men of the life that they might have had if Adam had not fallen. So Christ's offering, being a trespass offering restored that which Adam lost. He offered God representative obedience for God's people, he made restitution of life for them, and he added a fifth part. That is he not only gave God's people life, physical life that Adam had lost, he gave them eternal life, it was a fifth part. Paul's statement in Romans 5 and verse 20 may allude to it where Paul writes, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." As a result of the death of Christ, we have more than Adam ever lost.

Secondly, beginning with the fourth part of verse 10 through the 12th verse, Isaiah writes of the glories of the servant. And first he mentions his spiritual seed. He says, "He shall see his seed." The prophet turns to the consequences of the glorious work of the servant. And the first is that the servant shall see his seed. That is his spiritual seed, his people for whom he suffers in his redeeming work. Men dying cannot see their seed, but he shall find himself in others.

It's striking that Christians in the East have historically been called the family of the Messiah. They are the justified ones of verse 11 where Isaiah writes, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." There are those who are called "my people" in verse 8, "for the transgression of my people was he stricken." And then in the 10th verse the prophet goes on to speak about the servant's bodily resurrection. "He shall prolong his days," seems a clear reference to the resurrection of the servant. "Now by his father's side he sits and there triumphant reigns," as we sometimes sing.

In verse 10 through the first part of verse 11 we have his progressively realized mission. Verse 10 began with a statement that the divine will determined the servant's sacrifice. But this section makes it clear that the divine purpose embraced a broader and more glorious future. It shall prosper in the servant's hand and he shall see the successful conclusion of his work. The God of Scripture is no frustratable deity as conditionalism in theology likes to say.

“The hour is coming, (one commentator contends) when old Rome shall shake upon her seven hills, when Mohammad’s crescent shall wane to wax no more, when all the gods of the heathens shall lose their thrones and be cast out to the moles and to the bats. And then when from the equator to the poles, Christ shall be honored, the Lord Paramount of earth, when from land to land, from river even to the ends of the earth one king shall reign, one shout shall be raised, hallelujah, hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. At that time, contemporary anti-Christian theology whether Bultmannian, Moltmannian, Process Theology, or their cousins shall disappear into the empty heretical mists from which they emerged. In their place there shall prosper the pleasure of the Lord and he shall see and be satisfied with the triumphant realization of all for which he suffered and died in his atoning death.”

The prophet continues in verse 11 by speaking of his manifold justification. Isaiah writes, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” He the just one justifies. He reaps the fruit of his self sacrificial priestly activity. As Paul says, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,” Romans 5:19. Justification is the act of God by which he by virtue of the merits of Christ and his sacrifice, declares righteous the one who believes in him. A holy God cannot justify unholy sinners except through the sacrifice of a substitute who bears their penalty. That Christ has done. And we who believe are the beneficiaries of his marvelous work. How wonderful it is to know that we stand before him though unrighteous in ourselves, righteous in him.

William Cunningham, the famous theologian of New College in Edinburgh, Scotland, used to say, “God’s righteousness is the righteousness which God’s righteousness requires him to require.” That’s correct, and that righteousness is the righteousness imputed to lost sinners by virtue of Christ’s substitutionary offering of

himself for them. The glorious interchange of our sins for his righteousness is the work of divine grace and justice. Grace in the giving of the substitute, justice in the full payment of our debts by that substitute.

The difficulty is that man finds it so hard to admit his sin and guilt and that he is unable to deliver himself from his inability to please God. One of my teachers has told the story of a man who came up out of the ghetto of New York City and became very wealthy by writing a few plays that were bought by the entertainment industry. He decided that he wanted to buy a yacht with the money. He did and with it he engaged a crew to run it. He also bought a complete naval outfit with a captain's hat and the gold braid that went with it. He went down to the ghetto and got his old immigrant mother and took her out to see the yacht and to have a ride on it. When she got on board, he went below, put on his magnificent outfit, came up to his mother on the deck and said, “See mama, I's a captain.” His mother took a look at him and said, “Sonny, by me you is a captain, and by you, you is a captain, but by captains you is no captain.”

Men make the basic mistake of thinking that God subjects himself to human standards of goodness, holiness and righteousness. God however has his own unbreakable standard of perfect holiness. And without that, Scripture says no man shall see God. Of us it might be said, by me as we speak to one another you are good and by you you are good but by God you are not good. Scripture says, “There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God, they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one.” That settles the standards, we need a substitute to pay our penalty or we shall die eternally. That Christ has done. And as Isaiah says, by the knowledge of him many shall be justified. May you my listener be one of them.

His continual advocacy he speaks about in the latter part of verse 11. In the light of the progression of thought in the context and in the light of the fact that the verb bear may refer to continuous action, it seems probable that the clause, “He shall bear their

iniquities,” refers to the continual prayer ministry of our eternal priest who lives at the right hand of God to secure and to distribute the blessings he has won by his death. As John the Apostle writes, “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

His victorious dominion is set forth in the first part of verse 12, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.” Those words refer to his coming victorious reign over all, the great the strong and the small as well. In the gallery of Antoine Vertz at Brussels, there’s a collection of astounding and overwhelming paintings. There you can see the terrible painting of Napoleon in Hell. One called one of earth’s great ones showing a monstrous colossal jaw, crushing the bones of men, trampling them under his feet while leering at them all time. Another painting however is called “The Triumph of Christ,” a picture of Christ hanging on the cross. It’s a marvelous and beautiful body of the Savior. From the points of the crown of thorns, suggestive of the bearing of the curse of the Garden of Eden in describable light is streaming, mighty angles are sounding their trumpets, and dark, sinister and befoul evil spirits are fleeing away into the darkness. That day is coming, Christ through his cross is the last and only conqueror as Paul sets forth in Philippians chapter 2 verse 9 through verse 11.

I call the last clauses of verse 12 the banner of his cross for want of a better name. It’s important to note the order of his acts in the last few clauses. Since his exaltation is said to be “because he hath poured out his soul unto death,” we may infer that his death occurred before his exaltation. Further since the following acts of being numbered with the transgressors, the bearing of sin and the making of intercession are connected with the poring out of his soul unto death, we may assume that these acts are also acts that precede his death. And if that is so, then the intercession is most likely that referred to in Luke 23:34 where Jesus prayed for those who put him to death both Romans and Jews, “Father, forgive them, for they no not what they do.”

Now let us remember that ignorance of the law is no excuse, and therefore Jesus is not praying for their eternal salvation on the ground of their ignorance. But while ignorance is not an argument for eternal salvation, it is a basis for suspension of the judgment of the time for the rejection of God's offer in Christ's atoning work. Thus Jesus does not pray for cancellation of the certain judgment to come, that could not be. He rather is praying for a suspension of the judgment for a period of time so that men may have an opportunity to reverse their rebellious hostility through the knowledge of God's revelation and the Redeemer's sacrifice in blood.

The Greek word translated here by forgive is a word that may be rendered by let them go or release them. And so Jesus prayed, “Father, release them, for they know not what they do.” Our Lord prayed for the continuation of general history in order that the special history of salvation, that is the gathering of his elect may continue and flourish and the salvation of the whole body of the redeemed people of God. He prayed that the divine wrath be suspended for an age of Grace, that Paul God's chosen vessel for Gentiles and the people of Israel may be saved and complete his ministry. He prayed that Augustine the rediscover in his day of grace might do his work that Luther, the father of the Reformation may rediscover in his day justification by grace through faith, that Calvin, the great theologian of grace might write his institutes and influence multitudes for Christ. He prayed for the whole church and for us as Peter says, “The Lord is not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to repentance.” You'll notice I've supplied the words, “Of us,” because the context makes that necessary in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 9.

The realization of his salvation is the note I close on and the clause which has the clue to it is the expression, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” That means by the knowledge of him, the genitive being an objective him. In this knowledge, the problem of man finds its divine solution. In the knowledge of him comes peace with God. An unhappy skeptic once said to a happy old saint, “Can you tell me

just what is the gospel you believe, and how you believe it?” And she quietly replied, “God is satisfied with the work of his son, that’s the gospel I believe. And I’m satisfied with it, that’s how I believe it.” It was well said.

My desire is that you will take this hymn’s stanza for your response to the suffering servant’s offering for sinners. “I take the cross of Jesus for my abiding place. I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face. Content to let the world go by to know no gain nor loss, my sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.”

Let me say a few words in conclusion. Who is he that haunts this amazing prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12? We hear about him, we learn of him, but he does not speak and identify himself. We see his effects on others, he startles or sprinkles some, the mouths of kings are slammed shut before him in silence. Those who thought him cursed by God now extol his substitutionary death for their sins. The confession of their rejection is accompanied with an acknowledgement of their sin and his obedient death by the Father’s will. Who was he than? What was his name? Where shall we find him? Has he come or do we wait for him? Isaiah offers no clear answer. The prophecy’s details find a staggering correspondence about seven centuries later in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. And there is still no more convincing answers to the questions than Philip the Apostle’s “We have found him of whom Moses and the law and the prophet’s did write, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph.” Countless saints both of Israel and the Gentiles have rested their lives upon him through the centuries and found him all that Isaiah said the servant would be. Come, join that company, find peace with God, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. And no more wonderful time to believe in him exists then right now as you listen by your radio. May God in his marvelous grace enable you to come and rest in the blood that the suffering servant shed for sinners. Next week, the Lord willing we’ll be ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]

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