

The Death of the Servant

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[0 : 00] So let's read together from Isaiah 53. This week we're going to concentrate on verses 7 to 9, but let's again read the whole chapter.

Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

[1 : 07] We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of my people he was punished. He was signed a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

[2 : 11] Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. So today we're thinking about the death of the servant.

So Isaiah 53 verses 7 to 9. One of the roles that I have in our presbytery, the Edinburgh and Perth presbytery, is that I get to help with candidate interviews, those who are considering ministry.

And one of the questions that we always ask is about the nature of ministry. You know, ministry involves leadership and service. We'll ask, you know, how do you assess your strengths and weaknesses?

And I love it, and this happens more and more, when our candidates answer, do you know, you can't separate love, leadership and service. They belong together. Jesus taught about servant leadership.

[3 : 19] It's the pattern of Jesus. Paul Miller, a Bible teacher, has written a book called The J Curve. And his point is that in the ministry of Jesus, what we see is a descent from his incarnation then down to his suffering and his death before that J curve rises upwards to the resurrection.

And then Jesus ascended again into the glory of heaven, where he is exalted as King of kings and Lord of lords. And of course, that's a pattern that we see to and hear in the teaching of Jesus.

If you want to be great in God's kingdom, you must be the servant of all, Jesus said. And here in Isaiah 53, Isaiah led by the Spirit is anticipating this J curve.

And particularly here, we find ourselves reaching the lowest point, the suffering and death of Jesus. Next week, Easter Sunday, we'll be on the upward rise with the resurrection.

But here we're focusing on the cross. And one question for us to think about, what is my response to the cross of Christ? First of all, do I have saving faith?

[4 : 41] Am I trusting and resting in Jesus for salvation? And is this J curve pattern the pattern for my life? And we'll think about what we mean by that.

The big idea for today is that because Jesus submitted voluntarily, submitting willingly to suffering, death and burial on behalf of sinners, we should both love him and pattern our lives on him.

So let's think in verse 7 about voluntary submission. What's the picture that we have in here? He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent.

So he did not open his mouth. A lamb being led to the butchers, a sheep being led to be sheared, will go quietly and willingly. Why?

Because that animal has no idea what's coming next. The point of comparison for Isaiah is that Jesus submits willingly to the Father's plan.

[5 : 47] But there's a point of contrast. Unlike those animals, Jesus knows exactly what was coming last week in church. We were thinking about the agony of Gethsemane as Jesus anticipates drinking the cup of God's wrath.

And he says, if you are willing, let this cup be taken from me. If there's any other way to save sinners without me bearing the sin of the world and being cut off, then let's do that.

But Jesus submitted, not my will, but yours be done. The voluntary submission of Jesus is seen in that he will silently face what's described in verse 7 as oppression.

We come across that kind of language in the way that Pharaoh and the Egyptians treated Israel when they made them slaves. And he is afflicted.

The idea is that he kept submitting to affliction. His reflex action is to submit to suffering, knowing it was the will of God.

[6 : 50] And Isaiah, led by the Spirit, helps us to think about the question, why is Jesus going to do this? So looking ahead 700 years, why is the servant going to do this?

And we can go back to verse 6. And again, to use the imagery of sheep, he's going to do it because we, like sheep, have gone astray and we've turned to our own way.

He is going to have that sin and punishment laid on him for rebellious, wandering sheep like us.

Now, how do we see this prophecy fulfilled in the life of Jesus?

We can go, for example, to Matthew 26 and 27. Matthew 26, verse 62. And then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, are you not going to answer?

What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remains silent. And then, as Jesus is taken before the Roman governor, Pilate, chapter 27, verse 12.

[7 : 53] When Jesus was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, don't you hear the testimony they're bringing against you? But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor.

So after the agony of Gethsemane, Jesus will not fight. He will not resist. His disciples would have resisted for him. And remember, Jesus said that he could have.

He could have called in legions of angels to protect him from suffering and death. But he says he will submit willingly to fulfill scripture.

He understands Mark chapter 10, verse 45. Jesus didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The price for our freedom is the death of Jesus. So in that J curve, at that low point, Jesus willingly has become one of us.

[8 : 56] And he goes to that lowest point of suffering and death. And remember, Jesus is the son of God. He deserves all worship and glory and honour. But he volunteers to take sin and its punishment.

What is my response? What is your response to the cross of Jesus Christ? I've been reading a book by Jonathan Edwards called Charity or Love and Its Fruits, all about exploring 1 Corinthians 13.

And he has a wonderful phrase in that book where he says, We should be humbled by the loveliness of God. It's a lovely phrase, isn't it?

To see God as infinitely above us as he is, yet to see Jesus becoming the suffering servant to save us, should humble us and help us to see the loveliness of our God and Saviour.

With the response then, the proper response to that being faith, trust, receiving God's grace as it's offered to us in Jesus.

[10:00] That humble, grateful worship would be our response. And then it would be the pattern for our lives. Again, going back to those interviews that I have to do with Presbyterian.

I get to do rather. I definitely get to do. One candidate was talking about the ministry apprenticeship that he had done previously. And he had two weekly tasks.

As someone training for ministry, task one, clean the toilets every week. Task two, clean the pigeon poop off the church steps every week.

Principle, since Jesus has gone so low to become one of us, to die for us, to rescue and save us, nothing should be too low for his servants, for his people.

Makes us ask the question, am I willing to serve for the sake of Jesus? Am I willing to bear injustice and opposition in a loving way as part of my service to Jesus who has loved me and served me?

[11:06] So we see voluntary submission from Jesus. And in verse 8, we discover that voluntary submission leads him towards injustice and death in verse 8.

Now, as a society, one thing that we clearly value as a people is the idea of justice. And that shouldn't come as a surprise.

The Bible presents a God who is just and we are made in his image. Therefore, justice is something that we are concerned for. Now, we've seen this recently. We've seen it in the Black Lives Matter movement.

We've seen it in the vigils that have sprung up because of what happened to Sarah Everard and in response to violence against women more generally.

Maybe you've been in the meadows and you've seen Sarah's tree. Or we can think about the protests going on in Myanmar as the army are oppressing the people and oppressing democracy.

[12:04] And again, remember that we stand with that. The Bible says all people are created in the image of God. Therefore, all people have value.

So absolutely, as Christians, we can say black lives matter to Jesus. Therefore, black lives matter to us. Or they certainly should. Women and their rights matter to Jesus.

Therefore, women's rights should matter to us as they are defined biblically. But each of these movements that we see connected with justice has led to forms of protest movement, haven't they? And I introduce that because when we read of Jesus' suffering and death, a sense of injustice should rise up in us. Isaiah anticipates Jesus would be sentenced to die.

Jesus, who had done nothing deserving of death, nevertheless is unjustly tried and executed. And so there is an injustice that goes on.

[13:12] Verse 8 then says, By oppression and judgment he was taken away. That word oppression, sometimes translated as from arrest and judgment.

He was taken away to be executed having faced trial. That's what Isaiah anticipates. But we know that that would be an unjust verdict.

False witnesses are encouraged to speak against Jesus. A false verdict of blasphemy is reached. After all, Jesus is God. Therefore, he is entitled to claim the position and the titles of God.

And Pilate, the Roman governor, condemned Jesus despite saying, I see nothing wrong in this man. And yet, verse 8, yet, who of his generation protested?

There was no protest movement among his generation, among his contemporaries. The vast majority approved. The vast majority in Jerusalem on that day cried, crucify him.

[14:12] And that's the message that the apostles in the book of Acts pick up. When they say to the crowds, You, with the help of wicked men, put Jesus to death.

You disowned the holy and righteous one. You killed the author of life. Of course, Peter and the apostles will also say, But God, God had his plan behind and beyond and above that.

But they were responsible for that injustice. Isaiah continues, This servant was cut off from the land of the living. He was killed. What's the ultimate cause for them?

In God's words, For the transgression of my people, He was punished. Is it the transgression, the wrongdoing, The rebellion, the disobedience of the servant That leads to his death?

No. It's the transgression of my people. Here is a reminder that Jesus, The servant of the Lord, Dies as a substitute in the place of God's people.

[15:14] And he is punished. Punished by God. But is that for his sin? And again, the answer is no. He is sinlessly perfect. Rather, Jesus is loaded up with the sin And the shame and the guilt of

those he came to save.

That's why in Acts chapter 8, When the Ethiopian is reading This passage, Philip begins, And he begins to explain The good news about Jesus.

There is good news in Jesus Willingly submitting to This death. Because in this death, There is life for all Who will trust in him.

How is it good news? On the one hand, We see it's the most awful injustice. Here is the one perfect man. And yet he is condemned as a criminal.

But in God's plan, Jesus is handed over so that He might become our suffering saviour. When we look at the cross, It should remind us, Here is the verdict That you and I, By nature, And because of our actions, Deserve.

[16:27] We are not sinless and perfect. And a holy God, It is right to Condemn. We should be Cut off From God and his goodness, From his mercy, For all eternity.

That's what hell is, The place of Punishment For those who refuse To trust in God's salvation.

But here is the good news, The good news of that J curve. Jesus is cut off, Both in death And as he feels abandoned By his father, So that we might never Experience that.

In Jesus being cut off, God's justice is satisfied. God in Jesus Takes the penalty, The punishment, The place of Sinners.

Jesus faces his Personal hell. So that we Never have to If we would trust in him. So again, What is my response?

[17:34] What is your response To Jesus facing Injustice, Death, And the justice of God For sinners like us? As we recognise that the cross Is just a glimpse Into the Horror of The punishment That sin deserves, We have a choice.

Either We can say no to Jesus And we can face that punishment Ourselves When we stand before God on the judgment day As we all will. Or We can trust in Jesus We can turn from our sin Knowing that In love and in grace He takes Our sin And he takes Our place.

He is abandoned So we can be welcomed. And when we appreciate that Let this Create a J-shaped Pattern To your life And mine Where we're willing To face Our many deaths Where we are willing As Jesus says To deny ourselves To give up Personal pride And honour To sacrifice For the sake of others To show them The love of God That God has shown To us in Jesus And now having seen Jesus Willingly submitting To Injustice and death I want us to see God's response The beginning of God's response In verse 9 Where Jesus is honoured In burial Now it's a long established Principle And it was certainly Held by the Romans And the Jews In the first century That criminals And enemies Were typically not Honoured in death They'd be thrown in A common

Criminal's grave Something similar But what does Isaiah Anticipate Isaiah anticipates That Jesus would Die a criminal's death Verse 9 He was assigned A grave with the wicked But He would be honoured At his burial He was assigned A grave with the wicked And with the rich In his death Who's involved In the death And burial of Jesus The wicked are involved Those who conspire To kill The innocent servant Of the Lord Though he had Verse 9 Done no violence There was nothing In his actions That was sinful That merited punishment Nor was any deceit In his mouth There were no Words of his That would Lead him to be Described as guilty As charged No they conspired To kill the innocent Perfect servant The son of God So the wicked Were involved In his death And burial But so Were The wealthy And this sounds

So unusual And it's One of those Things that Only makes sense Like at home Most of Isaiah 50 They only make sense Once it was fulfilled How is it fulfilled In the life of Jesus Well when it's Discovered that Jesus has died Joseph A secret follower Who is wealthy Comes and asks For Jesus' body And honours it And wraps it And places it In his own tomb Buried with honour Unexpected honour At burial And this is the first part Of the upward rise Of the J-curve And this is a sign Of the father's approval The logic is That yes He was Killed by enemies Who despised him But God Wanted him honoured In his burial Because he had done No violence Nor was any deceit In his mouth Here is a sign

[21:18] Of the father's approval Of the son's work Here is a reversal That takes place Those enemies despise But God honours His obedient And faithful servant And next week Of course We're going to see That reversal theme Continue We're going to see The J-curve rise Further upwards In the glory And the honour Of Jesus In the resurrection But our point For today Is that as Jesus Is laid to rest There is a sign That God approves Of his son And his work We put up Don't we Headstones For loved ones By way of honouring Their life And their memory God wants to honour

Jesus In his being buried In a rich man's tomb He is God's verdict Of his servant The son who he loves He is honoured At death To show His approval His work is finished And God is satisfied Justice is done Love is displayed Salvation is open To all Who will believe

Again What's my verdict What's your verdict On the cross of Christ Does it match up To the verdict Of God The father Do we love Jesus As the beloved son Do we honour him As the saviour Of the world And our saviour May we have Faith In Jesus May we turn From sin And turn to put Our trust in him May this Easter Be a precious time Of remembering All that God Has done for us In Jesus And may we share This pattern of love With others For the sake Of our witness To the world