

What Happened at the Cross?

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[0:00] Let us pray. We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, that thou, my God, should die for me.

That's the refrain to Charles Wesley's wonderful hymn, And Can It Be? It's a wonderful hymn because it asks us not to be passive bystanders to the event of the cross.

The hymn asks us to look at the cross, to look at the injustice that took place upon it, to understand that we are active participants in the event of that day.

And in the first stanza, Charles Wesley writes, And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood?

Died ye for me, who cost his pain? For me, who've him to death pursued? And you know, as wonderful as Wesley's hymn is, and it is a wonderful hymn, he's not the first to write about the wonders of the cross.

[1:36] The Isaiah passage we read earlier in our reading is such a song of God's great salvation at the cross. This servant song of Isaiah is the fourth and last of the servant songs in the book of Isaiah that points to the servant of the Lord, of the Messiah who will come to accomplish the great rescue.

And in this song, we see the manner by which God had planned to save us from our long imprisonment to sin and death. This inspired song by the prophet Isaiah was written 700 years before Jesus' death upon the cross.

And it was written 500 years before the Romans even started using the cross as an instrument of terror and death. I encourage you, if you will follow along on page 729 of your pew Bible, and look with me there in chapter 52, verse 13.

Verse 13, the prophet Isaiah writes in this inspired song, Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted.

My servant, this is from God's perspective. My servant, spoken of here in verse 13, is the one who acts with perfect wisdom to accomplish what he proposed.

[3:12] To act wisely, we know in biblical terms, to act wisely is to have right standing before God. To fear God is the beginning of wisdom after all. This servant is perfect in his actions, perfect in his thoughts, and in his disposition to God.

This servant is unstained by sin. And we're made to see the end result of the servant's work. What's the end result?

He shall be high and lifted up. He shall be exalted, this servant. This servant is the risen, ascended, and glorified king.

But look further in verse 14. As many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.

So, we see in verse 13 the exaltation of this particular servant. But the son goes on to tell us the way this will be accomplished. And nothing about verse 14 seems triumphant or victorious.

[4:26] And here lies the confusion. This is not the picture of a champion, of a world beater, a world conqueror. This is not the picture of a celebrated victor.

Rather, we're made to see that many will be astonished. If you read astonished, think repulsed. Many will be repulsed by his appearance.

There will be a revulsion caused by a suffering which will consume his humanity. And here lies the mystery. This successful, exalted servant will be disfigured beyond human recognition.

Such would be his suffering. But this suffering, we're made to see, has a purpose.

Look further in verse 15. So shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. For that which has not been told them, they see.

[5:33] And that which they're not heard, they understand. So we're made to see that in fact the suffering that this servant will undergo has a worldwide effect.

The significance of the word sprinkle that you see there in verse 15 is important. In a temple, the blood of the sacrifice is sprinkled in a purification rite upon the altar to purify. So in the same way, the servant will sprinkle, that is, purify, by his suffering, he will sprinkle the nations.

Many nations, we're told, not just Israel. His suffering will bring kings into submission as the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection spreads.

And as they come to an understanding of the truth, as the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of people from every nation and tribe, and as he draws them to himself.

[6:44] This is the enormity of this purification. And it's further explained to us in the rest of chapter 53. We see this broken, battered figure.

We see this broken figure to be the God-man, Jesus Christ, broken and battered on the cross of Calvary for our redemption.

This is the unfolding mystery. How is God going to do it? How is he going to accomplish the great rescue?

How is he going to accomplish the salvation of mankind? this is how he does it. And as you read this, you cannot sideswept the cross.

You cannot sideswept Jesus Christ when you read these passages in Isaiah. Isaiah continues in chapter 53 verse 1-3 says, Who has believed what he has heard from us?

[7:51] And to whom has the harm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised, rejected, that means forsaken, by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Who would have imagined this is the way God will save us? Through suffering, through abject humiliation, God's champion is unlike any other champion we've ever seen.

He is a man with no majesty. He wasn't born into royalty. He was a man without beauty to commend him to our attention. He's a man with no place to lay his head.

[9:02] He was despised, rejected, forsaken by men. He was a man of sorrows, a man acquainted with pain and grief. Now the word acquainted there means that grief and pain was his constant companion.

This is who our savior is. And he goes on. Notice there in verse 3 of chapter 53, the end of it.

He was despised and we, we, that is all of us, we esteemed him not.

And isn't that the truth even today? many are ashamed of this Christ, this Christ that dies, this humiliating, shameful death upon the cross.

Many are ashamed of this Christ, the one who suffers and is humiliated. And that's why the Apostle Paul says the cross is a stumbling block.

[10:09] The world, the world seeks a champion. They are looking for a savior. The world seeks a champion who is majestic in appearance and commands power in the world.

A respected figure. The world is not looking for a loser like this cursed man upon a tree. And so the world still despises Jesus today.

They spurn his saving work and reject his call of salvation because they cannot serve a God who is so humbled.

What would that say about them if they are to follow a crucified Christ? What would that say about them? But you know that all who come to Christ who truly do come to him must come in submission and humility.

They must take on this humility of our Lord. They must come as beggars. Because what does it say about us that our Savior was crucified upon a tree?

[11:22] It says that we were people who have sinned against God's majesty. We are people who are deserving of that fate that he suffered on the cross.

We are sinners in need of mercy, in need of an atoning sacrifice. This is why Jesus is the stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, Apostle Peter says.

But we know that to those who come to Jesus, to this Jesus, who come to him not in pride, not saying I have something to offer, but who come at the end of their ropes.

That's how we all come to Jesus, at the end of ourselves. Nothing to offer, nothing in my arms I bring. When we do come to this Jesus, when we shut our mouth, open our ears, to hear the words of salvation, when we allow God the Holy Spirit to open our eyes, to see and our hearts, to understand, to such people who come to Jesus in that manner, to such people upon hearing and understanding this mystery of salvation, it becomes not a stone of stumbling, but a precious cornerstone.

It is a stone of more worth than any earthly possession. It is such people our Lord spoke of in his parable, they will gladly sell all they have in their possession, to gain this precious jewel, who is none other than the crucified and exalted Jesus.

[13:13] How do you come to this Savior? Do you come as beggars, knowing that it is for you that he died?

Isaiah continues in verse 4 to 6, and we'll end there in verse 6 because of our time, but I want to quickly point us to this last three verses, 4 to 6. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we, again, yes, we, esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

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. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

In these three verses we are made to see the great exchange that took place. Now the theological term for that is the penal substitutionary atonement.

[14:29] All that means that I pollute in word. All that means is that Jesus voluntarily, voluntarily submits to the Father's plan, took upon himself our punishment on the cross, he took upon himself our shame on the cross, our guilt on the cross, in our place.

peace. He goes as a substitute and carried upon himself the full wrath of God over our sin.

And in so doing, in so doing, his chastisement, his suffering brought us peace.

He satisfied God's justice upon the cross so we can be forgiven, so we can be accepted by God.

This is why Charles Wellesley, as he continues in his hymn, says, 'tis mystery all, the immortal dies.

Can you imagine it?

[15:49] God, the immortal being, the creator of the universe, dies, but he dies a death that we should have died, but so that we can be saved, he comes, he dies, and yet it is mercy all.

It is mercy, immense, it is an immense mercy. We can never repay it, we can never hope to, but it is immense and free.

'tis mercy all, immense and free, for oh my God, it found out me. Let me close with the words of our Lord himself in John chapter 12 verse 31.

Now is the time for the judgment of this world, Jesus says. now is the prince of this world cast out.

That is the devil, that's who the prince of the world is.

He's being cast out because of what Christ accomplished on the cross. He's broken the backs of the bondage of sin and death over us.

[17:08] The hour has come, Jesus says, for the Son of Man to be glorified. And how was he glorified? By the path of suffering.

And he says it, he continues in John 12, and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

Will you allow him to draw you to himself? If you hear, within the hearing of this message, you have not given yourself body and soul to this great Savior.

Now is the hour, now is the time. There is no other way, there is no other means by which your shame and guilt and punishment can be absolved, but upon that cross.

It is only upon that cross, and it's by faith in Jesus Christ. And if you have come to faith in him, will you rejoice that although this is a solemn day, it is a good day.

[18:24] You are redeemed, you are rescued, you are saved, you are adopted into the family of God because of Christ our Savior, our Redeemer, our Champion.

God what a great salvation, what a great deliverer. Amen.