

Christ Our Substitute

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Church. The scripture reading for today is taken from Isaiah 52 verses 13 through to Isaiah 54 verse 12.

He shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. 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 shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. For that which has not been told to them, they see. And that which they have not heard, they understand.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm 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 and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hid their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

[1 : 44] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

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.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living?

[2 : 53] By oppression and suffering, stricken for the transgression of my people. And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.

Although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth, yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring.

He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied.

By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous. And he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

[3 : 59] Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. Amen. Amen.

Thank you, Joan. I think most of us have been Christians long enough or we've been around church long enough to know that this scripture passage that we just read is a prophecy about Jesus Christ.

For this morning, I want to ask you just for a moment to lay aside that understanding that you have that this passage is about Jesus Christ.

And when I ask you to consider on its face and on its own, what in this passage that is before us would cause you to believe that it is about Jesus Christ?

Separately apart from the knowledge that we have, if we just look at this passage on its own, on its face, on its own merits, what in it would cause us to believe that this is about Jesus Christ?

What we see in the passage is there is this individual, a man, who is twice referred to as my servant.

[5 : 32] And since Isaiah was prophesying on behalf of God, he's God's servant. But what in it would cause us to believe that it is Jesus Christ?

And I ask that question because really we cannot, based on this passage alone, say that Jesus Christ is this servant. We cannot say who this servant is without the light of biblical revelation that we find in the New Testament.

And one of the accounts that we have in the New Testament that helps us to identify who this person is and that this person is indeed Jesus Christ is a passage that's found in Acts chapter 8. It's the account of Philip and the Ethiopian. And this account would have been in the very early days of the church.

Jesus had not too long been crucified and died and buried and raised from the dead and ascended back into heaven. And in this account, we have Philip, the deacon and the evangelist, who is sent by the Lord to this Ethiopian who had come up to Jerusalem to worship.

[6 : 54] He was a devout proselyte who had converted to Judaism. He was an official of Candace. He was the one who was the custodian of her treasury.

She was the queen of the Ethiopians. And the Holy Spirit directed Philip to go to this Ethiopian as he was making his journey back.

You don't need to turn there, but let me just read, beginning in verse 29 of Acts chapter 8. This is what it says. And the Spirit said to Philip, go over and join this chariot.

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, do you understand what you're reading? And he said, how can I unless someone guides me?

And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now, the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this. Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter.

[7 : 59] And like a lamb, before its sharer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied. Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth. And the eunuch said to Philip, about whom I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or someone else?

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

And so what we see is at a time where none of the New Testament had yet been written, Philip, from this passage, preached the good news about Jesus. Or he preached the gospel of Christ from this passage in Isaiah 53.

And I direct our attention to it this morning to make the point that even after Christ had come and suffered and died and was raised from the dead and ascended back into heaven, it was not obvious to this Ethiopian eunuch that Christ was a suffering servant in Isaiah 53.

[9 : 27] And he would not have been alone. But what was Philip's authority to say to the eunuch, this is Christ, and to preach Christ, and what was Philip's authority to do that?

Well, the answer is that Philip's authority, like the other apostles, was that they had gotten this understanding that Christ was this suffering servant from the lips of Christ himself.

Jesus self-identified with this suffering servant in Isaiah. And here's one example to show that.

On the night that he was betrayed, recorded in Luke's gospel in chapter 22, starting in verse 33, this is what it says. Peter said to him, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

Jesus said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day until you deny me three times, until you deny three times that you know me. And he said to them, when I sent you out with no money bag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?

[10 : 49] And they said nothing. He said to them, But now let the one who has a money bag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.

And verse 37, For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me. And he was numbered with the transgressors.

for what is written about me has its fulfillment. And so here Jesus is less than 24 hours before his crucifixion and he quotes Isaiah 53, verse 12, the very last verse of that prophecy.

And we can safely assume that he didn't just jump to the last verse. We can safely assume that he read it all. He knew it all. Jesus knew that this was about himself.

He knew the kind of death that he was going to die. He was not going to be surprised by it the next day. He knew to the detail how he was going to die.

[12 : 09] And so here's the undeniable point. Whomever Isaiah 53, 12 is about, the rest of Isaiah is about. The rest of this passage is about.

And since we know from the lips of Jesus that he is the one who fulfilled Isaiah 53, 12, we can safely assume that the rest of it is about him, the suffering servant.

And so when we read this passage in Isaiah and we read the Gospels and the Epistles in the New Testament, the undeniable understanding is that they point to Jesus Christ as the suffering servant, as the suffering Messiah.

But there's another truth, another undeniable truth that is also clear from this passage. In this passage this morning, there's an undeniable truth about us.

And when I say us, I mean the redeemed people of God. And the best description of what happened to Jesus in his crucifixion and in his death, which Isaiah prophesied, is that he died in our place.

[13 : 34] he died as our substitute. And so we who belong to Christ must not read Isaiah 53 as distant, unconnected, uninvolved, disconnected readers.

No, brothers and sisters, we must read it as those who are very much involved. Because were it not for us and for our sin, there would be no Isaiah 53.

we must read Isaiah 53 with the conviction, Christ died for me.

That's the way the Apostle Peter says it in 1 Peter 3 18. He says, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

and again the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter chapter 2 24, quoting from Isaiah 53 and verse 5, he says, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed.

[14 : 55] the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21 says it this way, for our sake, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Brothers and sisters, the point could not be clearer. The New Testament writers understood from the lips of Jesus that he was the suffering servant in Isaiah and their understanding of what was written about him was that his sacrifice is that he suffered as a substitute in the place of God's redeemed people.

And so while Good Friday is indeed about Christ, he is the central point, he is the blazing center of Good Friday. Brothers and sisters, we who belong to Christ, Good Friday is about us as well.

It is what Christ did for us. His redeemed people. The New Testament writers understood that salvation was purchased through the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross.

And in our remaining time this morning, I want to take us on a short guided tour through Isaiah 53. And I want us to consider what I believe are three heart-moving ways in which Christ was our substitute 2,000 years ago.

[16 : 45] When he ascended Golgotha's hill bearing a cruel Roman cross and where he endured both divine and human punishment that had never been experienced before and has never since been experienced.

So first, on Golgotha's hill, Christ was our substitute by bearing our sins. Isaiah 52, 13 through 53, 12, is the fourth of four servant songs that we find in the book of Isaiah.

in these four servant songs, we have this servant who is identified as a man. And since through the lips of Christ and the witness of the Old Testament servants, we know that Christ is this suffering servant, we also know that this man, this suffering servant, was no ordinary man.

He was not a man like you and me. when I mean mankind. He was not a human being like you and me. Christ is both the Son of God and the Son of Man.

He is both human and divine. He is both from heaven and from earth. And again and again in Isaiah 53, Isaiah tells us that the one who is the Lord's servant bore the sins of his people, not his own sins.

[18 : 27] He bore the sins of his people. And the point could not be clearer. Look first in verses 4 and 5 again. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. And upon him the chastisement that brought us peace. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his stripes we are healed. Why was Christ wounded for our transgressions? And why was he crushed for our iniquities?

Because he was our substitute. He was our substitute on whom God placed our transgressions and our iniquities.

And Christ was punished for them because he bore them. Isaiah 53, verse 6 makes this clear. All we like sheep have gone astray.

[19 : 34] We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53, verses 8 and 9 again.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people, stricken for the transgression of my people.

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth, he was stricken for the transgressions of his people, though he himself had no sin.

He was executed with the wicked because he was the substitute of the wicked and was treated as the wicked, though he himself had done nothing wrong.

And then finally in verses 11 and 12, out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many be accounted righteous.

[20 : 53] He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoiled with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many.

And makes intercession for the transgressors. here in Isaiah, Isaiah uses three particular words to talk about Jesus bearing our sins.

He uses three different words. He uses the word transgressions, he uses the word iniquities, and he uses the word sins. Sins is this all encompassing word that captures every violation, every wrong that is done against God.

Transgressions speak about the more ordinary kinds of violations of God's law, the kind of stumbling, the kind of slipping, the kind of getting out of the lines of what we should do and what we should be.

But iniquity speaks about sinful acts that are deeply rooted, twisted, depraved, wicked, premeditated, and predetermined against God.

[22 : 28] But the point is that Isaiah is using comprehensive language to show that Christ was our comprehensive sin-bearer in every way. There is no sin, there is no type of sin, there is no category of sin that Christ did not bear on behalf of his people.

And brothers and sisters, Jesus bore real, actual sin. Jesus did not bear principled sin or representative sin.

He bore actual sin. sins of actual people, his people, for whom he was the substitute.

All of the sins I have ever committed, all of the sins I will ever commit, was laid on Jesus Christ.

sins. And see, if all of them weren't, who will deal with the ones that weren't?

But that's not just true for me. That's true for every single person who has put his or her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus was a substitute, Jesus bore actual sins.

[23 : 55] And it matters to God that he doesn't say, well, you know, we'll just put a million, we'll just put a trillion, we'll just put something down. No, it matters to a holy God that every single sin is paid for.

And so on Jesus Christ, the God who keeps perfect record and knows all things laid on him as the substitute of sinners, every single sin, past, present, future, of all those for whom he was a substitute.

If you belong to Christ, all of your sins without exception was laid on him on that day when he hung on that cross.

again, here are the words of the apostle Peter, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

And again, the apostle Paul, for our sake, God made him, God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[25 : 25] Do you know that the entire Old Testament sacrificial system was about substitution? It's enough for us to grasp that whole sacrificial system in this way, that it was about substitution.

It was about when God's people, when members of God's community had sinned and they deserved to die because the wages of sin is death, God allowed them to bring an animal instead of them dying.

And the animal became their substitute to die in their place so they could go free. But think about it. Whether that animal was killed for food or killed as a sacrifice, it really didn't matter to the animal.

The animal is going to die in any way.

It was an animal, not a human. sin. But Christ who knew no sin, who did not have a single sin placed on him, on his selfless life, his sinless life, and that would have been bad enough.

[27 : 03] it would have been bad enough if the perfect holy son of God had one sin laid upon him. That would have been so egregious and so tumultuous to his righteous person.

But it was worse than that. God did not just lay a sin on him in some representative way. No, he laid the sins of all of his people on Christ.

The perfect holy son of God, the second person of the Trinity became a substitute for sinners.

And God placed upon him all the sins of all of his people. And Christ bore it.

he bore the weight of all of that sin. And here's something I know. If you've served the Lord for any length of time, I know you've sinned, as I have.

[28 : 08] And I think all of us who have sinned know the weight of sin. And not the weight of a whole bunch of sins.

We know the weight of a sin that we have committed, how it torments our conscience. how it burdens our soul. We know the weight of isolated sins that we have not confessed, that we have not repented of.

And that's not what happened to Jesus. Jesus bore the weight of all the sins of all of God's people. He was crushed under that. Christ. In the Garden of Gethsemane, that's what he began to perceive. Jesus was not weeping and agonizing because of crucifixion.

Crucifixion was a common thing in the land. It would not have been unusual to be walking, going to the well, and you're seeing the Romans take some person, some convicted criminal, up to the place to be crucified, and he's carrying his cross.

[29 : 20] And you would look, and you'd go about your business. Jesus was not agonizing over crucifixion. The two thieves who were on the side of Jesus, they were not. They were having conversations.

The agony for Jesus that started in Gethsemane and indeed started that night when he was going to be betrayed was at the weight of sin, the cup of the wrath of God that included both the wrath of God and the sin of man was what he contemplated.

And that is what was before him. Christ bore the sins of all of God's people from all time, from the beginning of time to the end of time.

And these are sins, brothers and sisters, that animals could not have atoned for. Jesus bore the sins of people under the old covenant who took animals for hundreds of years, who sacrificed animals for thousands of years.

Jesus bore their sins because the animals could never have covered and atoned for sin. Scripture tells us clearly, the blood of bulls and goats cannot atone for sin.

[30 : 36] And God knew that. God knew that because he never intended it to atone for sin. It was God's way of foreshadowing.

It was God's way of pointing to the ultimate sacrifice, who indeed would be able to take away the sin of man.

And even as God was allowing his people to bring those animals and to sacrifice those animals, though they did not atone for sin, God was delaying his righteous judgment against sin because before the foundation of the world he ordained that Christ would be the perfect lamb who would be slain for the sin of sinners.

And so the Old Testament sacrificial system could not deal with sin once and for all. God only intended it to be a shadow that pointed forward to a permanent sacrifice who would deal with sin once and for all.

And this brings you to my second point. Not only was Christ our substitute bearing our sins, Christ was also our substitute by satisfying God's justice.

[32 : 06] The reason God's justice had to be satisfied was because sin. Because God is perfectly holy, because God is perfectly just, he cannot and therefore will not overlook sin.

All sin is against God. And God, because of his holiness, because of his perfection, cannot overlook even the smallest sin. sin is death.

Because it is against a holy God. And the punishment for sin against a holy God expresses the seriousness of sin against God and the holiness of God.

It would be sin to do otherwise. It would be wrong for God to do otherwise than to punish sin with death.

Now, God could have chosen not to send Christ. He could have chosen not to give us a substitute. and he could have allowed us to bear the full consequences of our sin, by which his wrath would have been poured out upon us, and we would have suffered and died in our own place, and thereafter we would have endured eternal punishment in hell, separated from God.

[33 : 45] But in love and mercy, God chose not to do that. In love and mercy, he sent his son as our substitute to take our place and to bear our sins and to endure his wrath for those sins.

And in Christ's suffering and in his death, God's just requirement for sin, that sin be punished, was satisfied.

Here in Isaiah 53, we have repeated language that points to Christ satisfying God's justice for sin. In verse 4, it says, Christ was stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

Verse 5, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. Again in verse 5, God chastised him and disciplined him. Why? Not for himself, but for us.

In verse 7, Christ was slaughtered as the lamb. In verse 8, he was cut off out of the land, stricken for the transgression of my people.

[35 : 01] Verse 10, the Lord crushed him and put him to grief. This was God meting out his just requirements, satisfying his own justice. Again in verse 10, and the Lord made his soul an offering or sacrifice for sin.

Proving that all the animal sacrifice couldn't have done it. And finally in verse 12, we have the ultimate expression of God's justice being satisfied.

Christ's soul was poured out to death. Because that is what sin deserved. Brothers and sisters, in Christ satisfying God's justice for sin, God treated him exactly as we deserve to be treated because of his sins.

The beginning of Isaiah, this passage, verse 15, in Isaiah 52, we read in verse 14, and many were astonished at you.

His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance that his form beyond that of the children of mankind. It was the kind of sight that you would go up to and you would put your hand over your mouth.

[36 : 38] you'd be aghast at what you saw. And if God was just an angry God who was just flying off the handle and just lost his temper with Jesus, that would be a separate issue.

We know that's not the case. What we know is that a holy God was meeting out the just requirement for sin. That is what sin justly deserved.

your sin and my sin. It would be less than God to have done to Jesus what did not need to be done. But here's what we know. This is the eternal son. This is the one in whom God is well pleased. This is the one who has always been with the father in sweet communion. And we could rest assured that he only punished his son to satisfy justice to the exact degree he was required and no more. And no more. And the suffering of Jesus helps us to see the hideousness of sin. It helps us to see the seriousness of sin because that is what sin deserved.

[38 : 02] Your sin and my sin. This is no exaggeration of justice. This is perfect divine justice. And because God was satisfied in the sacrifice of his son 2,000 years ago, we who belong to Jesus Christ, though we deserve to die for our sins, we get to go free.

because Christ both bore our sins and he satisfied God's justice by paying the price of redemption for our sins by forfeiting his own life as our substitute.

So Christ is our substitute who bore! bore our sins. He is our substitute who satisfied God's justice on our behalf.

And third and finally and briefly, Christ is our substitute because he met God's righteousness. Christ met God's righteousness not just because he bore our sins and not just because he paid the price for our sins.

No, Christ met God's righteousness because he himself was perfectly righteous. This word righteous speaks about God's moral perfection.

[39 : 39] So when we say that a person is righteous, what we mean is that in God's sight, that person is considered morally perfect and without sin.

That's what it means. to be righteous in God's sight. Another word that communicates the same idea is the word justification. It's a righteousness that is bestowed upon another person, though that person in him or herself is not righteous.

It's a declared righteousness. righteousness. Look again at verse 11. Isaiah tells us that Christ met God's righteousness so that sinners like you and me can be accounted righteous.

It says in verse 11, out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Being counted righteous is the apex and the glory of substitution.

[41 : 05] It is a wonderful thing for Christ to bear our sins. It is a wonderful thing for Christ to pay the punishment for our sins and satisfy God's justice.

But it is an amazingly glorious thing. to be declared righteous, knowing that we in and of ourselves are not in the sight of a holy God, to be accounted as righteous.

Christ did for us what the law could never do. And indeed, the law was never intended to do. We can keep the law all we want, it will never make us righteous in the sight of God.

Christ did for us what animal sacrifice could never do. all the bulls, all the goats, all the animals, they were to be offered, and their blood to be offered.

It would not be an adequate death even for one human being, much less for the mass of God's people, the mass of those for whom Christ died.

[42 : 28] Brothers and sisters, we needed to meet God's righteous requirement, but none of us could. None of us could. None of us could. None of us could. the only one who could, did.

He met God's righteous requirements, and the reason he was able to do it was he was God himself. God met his own righteous requirements in the person of his son who came to this earth and lived the perfect life that none of us could live.

life. And let's understand that Jesus not only met God's righteous requirement on the cross, but Jesus met it in his living.

He met it in his walking on this earth. Where he perfectly pleased God, he kept the law perfectly, and he did that as a substitute for his people.

You and I are called to faithfully serve the Lord, to love him with our whole hearts. We are called to walk in his ways. But we have and we will fall short.

[43 : 45] And thank God that we have one who has done it. And he did it not for himself, he did it for his people, he did it as a substitute for sinners.

God sent him to this earth to take on human flesh, and in his humanity, he was like us. But in his divinity, he was unlike us, and therefore he could be that perfect, righteous one to meet the righteous requirements of God.

Here again, the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, 21, for our sake, he, God, made him Christ, to be sin, who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Theologians call it the great exchange, and that's what happened on the cross. That's what happened in that great transaction. Jesus took our place so that we might take his place.

righteousness. And here's something that is so amazing that I am absolutely sure that when I say it, some of you will doubt it.

[45 : 12] The righteousness that God sees those whom Christ has redeemed with, the righteousness he sees them with, is Christ's righteousness.

righteousness. A perfect righteousness. That is the righteousness that God accounts to them. Perfect righteousness.

Though we have none of our own and none in and of ourselves, Jesus became our substitute. He took our place that we might take his. righteousness. It is Christ's righteousness.

It's a substituted righteousness. God counts us righteous on his behalf. When God looks at me and God looks at you, it is the righteousness of Christ, that righteous garment, that perfect righteous garment that was given to me through Christ, is what he sows.

Brothers and sisters, this is amazing grace. May it not be for any of us boring grace. This is amazing grace. If this doesn't move your heart this morning, I encourage you to survey it again.

[46 : 31] I encourage you to do what we sang about this morning. Let us survey the wondrous cross. Christ became sin for us who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ.

Christ is our substitute because he bore our sins. Christ is our substitute because he satisfied God's justice. Christ is our substitute because he met God's righteousness.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your amazing love. Thank you for your patient forbearance, Lord, that over thousands of years you forbore with sinners knowing that one day you would send your own son who was God of very God to take on human flesh and to become a substitute for sinners to bear their sins and then to be punished for those sins and satisfy your justice and then finally to be able to meet your righteous requirements that sinners may be declared righteous.

Father, would you make these truths fresh to our hearts this morning and may we be freshly amazed at the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

I give you thanks for this now in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.