

The Good News About Jesus

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[0 : 00] Amen. Isn't it powerful to hear the message of the cross all through the scriptures? You realize we started with Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

We've heard from Isaiah, one of the prophets. We've heard from a psalm of David. We've heard from one of the gospels. And now we're going to turn to the book of Acts.

So if you would, please turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts. And I'm going to read from chapter 8 beginning in verse 26.

Here in the book of Acts we see that this is the birth of the early church. Jesus has come. He has lived. He has died. He has risen. He has ascended back to the Father.

He's now sent the Holy Spirit. And he's mobilized the church to go out and to spread the message of the gospel. And so we see the church blossoming as the message is being spread.

[0 : 58] So if you would, follow along with me as I read, starting in Acts chapter 8, verse 26. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot. And he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 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 are 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. And like a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

[2 : 10] In his humiliation, justice was denied him. 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 about someone else? Then Philip opened his mouth. And beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

And as they were going along the road, They came to some water and the eunuch said, See, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stop.

And they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch. And he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, The spirit of the Lord carried Philip away. And the eunuch saw him no more.

And went on his way rejoicing. Now you talk about a divine opportunity. And we pray for opportunities to share the gospel with others around us.

[3 : 13] I don't know if any of us have ever had a providential opportunity quite like this. You know, we ask the Lord for open doors to share the good news of Christ. The door does not get any more open than what we saw here with Philip.

The angel personally directs Philip to the place. He sees the Ethiopian official there in his chariot returning from worship in Jerusalem. The spirit tells him, Go join this man in his chariot.

Philip hears the man reading God's word out loud. He asks the man, Do you understand what it is that you're reading? The man says, No, I wish somebody would explain it to me. He invites him up into this chariot.

And the passage of scripture, Verse 32, That the man was reading was this, Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter. And like a lamb before its shearer is silent, So he opens not his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth. This is the passage of scripture that we heard, Read earlier from Isaiah chapter 53.

[4 : 22] And this beautiful scripture about God's suffering servant. The one who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. This man was sitting in his chariot reading this scripture seeking to understand.

But he had a problem. What was it? The Ethiopian was missing a key piece of information. Wasn't he? As he read this text out loud to himself and then to Philip, He was perplexed.

And he asked Philip, About whom I ask you is the prophet writing these things? Himself or someone else? Who is this man of sorrows?

Who is this man who is acquainted with grief? Who was this writing about? And of course, he didn't realize this, But this question has become a very common and a very controversial question, Even to this day.

To this day. Many ask that same question about Isaiah 53. Who is this about? I remember as a college student, I took an Old Testament survey class.

[5 : 32] I was a brand new Christian, new to the faith. Wasn't really sure what I was getting myself into. But this was an elective that was offered to me. And so I signed up, Old Testament survey.

And what I quickly realized was that my professor was a very theologically liberal Jewish man. And he made it very clear, as we got to the book of Isaiah, That whatever else we might think about this passage, This suffering servant in Isaiah 53 was definitely, certainly not about Jesus Christ.

His position was that this passage was about Israel. It was not about the Messiah. That was his perspective. Others share that perspective. He made that very clear. This cannot be about Jesus.

Others have the perspective that maybe Isaiah was, in fact, writing about himself. This was Isaiah describing his own suffering as a prophet of God. Others take the position that he was writing about Moses.

Others say Josiah. King Hezekiah. Some say he was writing about Ezekiel. There's plenty of different answers to this question. Who is this suffering servant?

[6 : 43] But I hope you can see it's an important question for us to ask. And it's even more important for us to get it right. Who is this suffering servant?

Who is it who was oppressed and afflicted, who opened not his mouth, who was crushed by the very will of the Lord to make many accounted righteous?

Who is it who will bear their iniquities? You know, it's interesting that most of the ancient rabbis in the years before Jesus was born almost unanimously agreed that this passage, Isaiah 53, pointed forward to its fulfillment in one individual coming Messiah.

But then Jesus comes, and he's not quite what they expected. And now this beautiful passage of Scripture has begun to cause some issues.

So much so that it's often called the forbidden chapter. Which is ironic. Because the chapter itself begins with unbelief. Who has believed what he has heard from us?

[7 : 50] 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.

No beauty that we should desire him. The one that Isaiah wrote about was not going to be impressive to the physical eye. He was going to be despised and rejected.

One Jewish-Israeli scholar named Etan Bar, he writes that the 17th century Jewish historian Raphael Levi admitted that long ago the rabbis used to read Isaiah 53 in the synagogues.

But after the chapter caused arguments and great confusion, the rabbis decided that the simplest thing would be to just take the prophecy out of the Haftarah readings in synagogues.

And that's why today when we read Isaiah 52, we stop in the middle of the chapter and the week after we jump straight to Isaiah chapter 54. We've read Isaiah 53 tonight.

[8 : 58] And I wonder, as we read and as we think through this chapter of God's word, who do you say Isaiah has written about?

Philip had an answer to that question, didn't he? Philip had an idea of who this chapter might be about. Verse 35 of Acts chapter 8 says, According to Philip, this Old Testament passage written 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ found its fulfillment in the man Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus is the suffering servant. And of course, as you read back through this passage in Isaiah chapter 53, you realize this Old Testament prophecy, it describes Jesus perfectly, doesn't it?

It describes his death perfectly. It describes the purpose of his coming and dying perfectly. We know Jesus grew up like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground.

He was not impressive. He was not from a noble family. Jesus had no form or majesty that we should desire him, no beauty that we should look upon him. Jesus was despised and rejected by men, still is to this day.

[10 : 29] Jesus Christ was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As we look to the cross and consider the words that we've sung this evening, the passages that we've read this evening, if we look to the events of Good Friday, we see Jesus beaten and stripped and pierced.

His body mangled, his flesh torn, a crown of thorns placed upon his head. And his wonderful prophecy 700 years before he comes, it explains to us why.

It says Jesus has borne our griefs. He's carried our sorrows. He was stricken and smitten by God and afflicted.

Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Jesus was the chastisement that's brought us peace.

And with Jesus' wounds, we are healed. For the message that we proclaim here on Good Friday is the unthinkable hope of the gospel that all we like sheep have gone astray.

[11 : 38] Each one of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. The Son of God has taken our place.

That's the gospel message. I came across this quote today. I just had to share it with you. It's beautiful. Normally I find the good quotes the day after I preach.

Today the Lord allowed it to happen just an hour or two before this evening. This is John Stott in his book, *The Cross of Christ*. He says, The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man.

Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be. God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be.

Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone. God accepts penalties that belong to man alone. It's a powerful message.

[12 : 52] It's the only hope we have. The message of Good Friday is that for those who trust in this suffering servant, the sin and guilt that we have earned has been taken from us and placed upon him.

But did you hear that caveat? God, it's important for us to hear, so I'm going to say it again. For those who trust in this suffering servant, those who trust in him by faith, for those who trust in this suffering servant, our sin is given to him and he's punished for our sin.

His righteousness is given to us and we're blessed for his obedience. For those who trust this suffering servant, by faith, we have our sin removed from us and paid for in full in the cross of Christ.

That's what we celebrate this Good Friday. So as we close this evening, I just want to encourage you as we think upon the events of Good Friday, as we remember the cross of Christ, please don't let this Good Friday and Easter Sunday just pass by.

You come to church, you go home, nothing changes, three-day weekend is here, it's gone, and nothing's different. Make certain in your heart this evening that you trust in this suffering servant by faith.

[14 : 21] Make certain in your heart this evening that you answer with complete confidence that you know who this suffering servant is and you know that it is your iniquities that drove him to the cross and you know that the Lord has laid on him your sin and your grief that he's paid your debt in full.

Acts chapter 8. It says that when the Ethiopian eunuch heard this message of the gospel, I love this, he didn't waste any time, did he? He responded in faith.

Verse 36, Acts chapter 8. It says that as they were going along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, see, here's some water, what's keeping me from being baptized? And they went down into the water, the eunuch now believing the gospel, now trusting that this man Jesus has suffered and died to take away his sins.

He was baptized and it says he went on his way rejoicing. For now I realize that Good Friday is somber as we think about the cross of Christ.

But for those who have received what he's done, this message is reason to rejoice. And I pray that as we think on the message of the cross of Christ, that your response this evening by faith in what he's done would be that you are able to leave this place rejoicing.

[15 : 53] Your sins have been paid for. He's died in your place. His death is your death. And as we come to Sunday, the good news, friend, his life is your life.

What can separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus our Lord? Nothing. Neither life nor death. Anything else in all creation. Because of this suffering servant, all who trust him by faith, not even death itself can have the last word against us.

Amen? Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we praise you for what you've done.

We praise you for your perfect life in our place where all of us have failed. And we praise you for your sacrificial death in our place to take the judgment of God against our sins that we have earned. And we pray, Father, that we would look upon the man on the cross by faith and receive what you've done. That we would leave this place rejoicing in the hope of the gospel. We pray in Jesus' name.

[17 : 10] Amen.