



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 53:4-6

"The Vicarious Messiah and the Submissive Messiah"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The theme of our series of studies is the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah, and the subject for today as we turn to Isaiah chapter 53 verse 4 through verse 6 is the vicarious or substitutionary Messiah. The passage that we're turning to might well be called the great reversal. The Israel of the past of the time of our Lord in ignorance denied the Holy and just one and slew the author of life Peter says in Acts chapter 3. They self confidently assumed responsibility for the Messiah's death by shouting, "His blood be on us and on our children." The Israel of the future, however, because they will be then an enlightened people, humbly accept their guilt by crying out, "But he was wounded for our transgressions," Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 5. As we have seen in a previous study the tenses of the verbs in verses 1 through 9 of Isaiah chapter 53 set the reference of the thoughts expressed by the speakers in past time. They're looking back over their past acts and attitudes to the Messiah and acknowledging their sinful failure to recognize him as the promised deliverer. It is truly the great reversal.

This great prophetic song of the suffering servant is also one of the most significant of all the Old Testament passages on the atonement. And it surely indicates that whatever theory we may hold, it must include the idea of substitution. Christ's death is far more than simply an act revealing God's love and thereby producing in us a

response of faith and love that saves as men like Peter Abelard and many contemporary theologians have maintained. It is also far more than a defeat of Satan and a release of sinners held captive by him although that's a true idea expressed in the New Testament. The classic idea of the atonement leads stress upon the defeat of Satan. And it is more than simply a satisfaction for sin rendered to the justice and holiness of God as Anselm stressed although any genuine explanation of the atonement must include that. To put it simply, the death of Christ was a penal satisfaction through substitution. Christ bore as a substitute for God's people the divine penalty for sin and thus accomplished their release from the judgment of sin. That is what is expressed by the words of our passage in Isaiah 53 verse 4 through verse 6.

Listen to the 5th verse, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed." There it is, plainly, a penal satisfaction of the divine claims against us through substitution. As Forsyth put it, speaking of the atonement made by the Son of God, "There it is that Christ comes to himself for good, there as it were he finally finds his tongue and takes command of the deep eloquence of moral things." That this section is written of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ is confirmed by Matthew's citation of verse 4 after the description of Jesus' casting out of demons and of his healing of all that were sick, "That is might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying himself took our infirmities and bear our sicknesses." That's Matthew chapter 8 and verse 17.

We turn now to verse 4 where the prophet speaks of the confusion of Israel. He writes, "Surely he hath born our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." As we have said, Isaiah 52 verse 13 through chapter 53 verse 12 is Israel's great penitential confession. It is to be made in the future, perhaps at the time that they see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and abundant glory. In that case, the prophecy is the vocalization of Zechariah 12:10 through 14 where Zechariah prophesies,

"And I (he's speaking of the Lord) will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

What a glorious day that will be when Israel, moved by efficacious grace from God shall come to the realization of what they have done to the Messiah and what he has done for them. Verse 4 then expresses their faith in that future day, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." The adverb surely, incidentally, is often used of an exclamation to emphasize the unexpected. Since the word translated hath born is used in connection with the bearing away of the nation's sins by the goat of departure on the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16:22, it has been suggested that here there is an allusion to the Day of Atonement. The true Day of Atonement would then be the day Christ died on Golgotha and that of course is true.

The prophet speaks of their faith then when he writes, "yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." This part of the verse describes how they felt at the time that Christ was carrying out his atoning ministry. They confess, "Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." The attitude of Israel to him was similar to the so called Deuteronomic view of suffering that is if a person suffers misfortune, it's because he is or has done something wrong.

In Mr. Schultz's cartoon, "Peanuts," which I love to read, it's Lucy who champions that view. The following encounter of Linus with a sliver in his finger and Lucy's reasoning about it illustrate it. The cartoon begins with Lucy seeing something is wrong with Linus who's in pain says, "What's the matter with you?" And Linus replies, "I have a sliver in my finger." And Lucy says, "Aha! that means you're being punished for something." She says, "What have you done wrong lately?" And Linus says, "I haven't

done anything wrong." Lucy's response is, "You have a sliver haven't you? That's a misfortune isn't it? You're being punished with misfortune because you've been bad." By this time, Linus' tongue is out of his mouth and beads of perspiration are falling from his face because the sliver is hurting. Charlie Brown at this point enters the discussion with his words, "Now wait a minute, does," but Lucy interrupts him with, "What do you know about it Charlie Brown, this is a sign, this is a direct sign of punishment, Linus has done something very wrong and now he's to suffer misfortune." Lucy continues her sermon, "I know all about these things, I know that." And at that point, Linus now interrupts with, "It's out, it just popped right out." Lucy, obviously unhappy and looking like a thunder cloud turns to walk away, but she hears Linus say, "Thus endeth the theological lesson for today."

This viewpoint is that of the nation, for they thought him stricken, a word sometimes used of leprosy as in Isaiah case. And further, they say that they thought that he had been smitten of God. In other words, they thought his sins were the reason he was suffering crucifixion. Actually, he was smitten of God as verse 10 clearly indicates, but it was not for his sin, but rather that he might accomplish atonement in his death. The verse clearly indicates that the sinful nation is not a people without religion, they think of him as smitten of God. They know about God, they even believe in the existence of God, and they regard suffering as a punishment for sin, the Deuteronomic view. They however look to the wrong place for the sin. Instead of looking at themselves, they look for sin in him. In the spirit of pharisaism, in Jewish literature, the Lord Jesus Christ has been called, pasha, the transgressor. And in the Talmud he's linked with Titus and Balaam in Hell.

The conviction of the nation in the future is stated in the 5th verse where we read, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." The opening, "But he," of verse 5 is very emphatic. It's contrasted with the, "yet we," of verse

4. "Yet we esteemed him smitten of God, but he was wounded for our transgressions."

The word rendered here by wounded is one that has the sense of piercing, he was pierced for our transgressions is the rendering of the New International Version, and it suggests the crucifixion where the Roman soldier pierced his side producing the out poured blood and water, look at John 19 verse 34.

The nation then in the future recognizing that he has been pierced for their sins shall be happy to sing Toplady's great hymn, "Rock of Ages" with its stanza, "Rock of ages cleft for me let me hide myself in thee, let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power." Then the prophet speaks of their attitude regarding his crushing in the second part of the 5th verse. "He was crushed or bruised for our iniquities." The crushing reminiscent of the prophecy in Eden of the crushing of the serpent refers to the depth, intensity and completeness of his suffering. He bore it all and finished his work.

They also then speak of his chastisement. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him." The chastisement which has led to their peace finds its origin in his bearing of it, and at that time they recognize that fact. The peace of course is peace with God.

And finally, they speak of his bruise in the last clause of the verse, "And with his stripes we are healed." The words with his stripes are literally by his bruise, the word fro bruise being singular in number. It's generally taken as a collective singular, but if it is not, it may refer to the distinctive bruising of the cross. One notices, as George Adam Smith has pointed out, progress in the nation's appraisal of the Suffering Servant. At first, they were bewildered by the servant's suffering, then they thought it contemptible thus passing upon it an intellectual judgment. Then forced to seek a moral reason for it, they accounted it as penal and due tot the servant for his own sins. Then they recognized that its penalty was vicarious, that the servant was suffering for them. And finally, they knew that it was redemptive, the means of their own healing and peace. "This is a naturally climax and a logical and moral progress of thought," the great Aberdeen professor has

concluded." The we of the passage refers to the true Israel, believing Israel, those whose thoughts of him have been changed by God working in their hearts, those to whom the arm of the Lord has been revealed in effectual grace.

And finally in the 6th verse, the third and final one of our study today, the prophet writes, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we've turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He first speaks about their sin, "All we like sheep have gone astray" Israel of the future confesses. They make their confession of sin and it's unreserved, for all have sinned. It's thoughtful for the metaphor sinning like sheep is marvelously revealing, we'll say a word about it in a moment. And it's personal and particular, "For each has turned to his own way."

Mr. Spurgeon's comments on sinning like sheep are very illuminating; I pass them on to you because I think they're good. He writes,

"Not like the ox which knoweth its owner, nor even like the ass which remembers its masters grip, nor even like the swine which if it wandereth all day long cometh back to the trough at night, but like sheep we have gone astray, like a creature cared for but not capable of grateful attachment to the hand that cares for it, like a creature wise enough to find the gap in the hedge by which to escape, but so silly as to have no propensity or desire to return to the place from which it had perversely wandered. Like sheep, habitually, constantly, willfully, foolishly, without power to return, we have gone astray. How true that is, all we like sheep have gone astray."

It has been said every heresy has its root in defective views of sin. And it's probably a true observation. And if it is so, then this national remnant of believers is on its way to sound theology, for they recognize their sin. Their salvation they speak about in the latter part of verse 6, "And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The clause that I have just read, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all brings the

third stanza of the marvelous song of Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 to a brilliant climax. The figure suggested by the verb laid on is an exceedingly emphatic and violent figure. The word is used in 2 Samuel 1:15 where David commands one of his young men to fall upon him, that's the word, and slay the young Amalekite who had willfully slain King Saul.

It is as if one held up a magnifying glass and focused all the light of the sun on one small spot. What a fire that would produce. God caused all the fires of divine judgment and retribution produced by universal human sin to meet in the soul and spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ as he hung on Calvary's cross. "There he bore the awful plague of unknown sufferings," as the Greek liturgy has it. Mr. Spurgeon's metaphor captures the violence of the judgment of the Suffering Servant for the elect but sinful sheep.

"Before a great storm, (he writes) when the sky is going black and the wind is beginning to howl, you've seen the clouds hurrying from almost every point of the compass as though the great day of battle were come and all the dread artillery of God were hurrying to the field. In the center of the whirlwind and the storm when the lightning threaten to set all heaven on ablaze, and the black clouds fold on fold, labor to conceal the light of day, you have a very graphic metaphor of the meeting of all sin upon the person of Christ. The sin of ages past and sin of the ages to come, the sins of those of the elect who were in heathendom and of those who were in Jewry, the sin of the young and of the old, sin original and sin actual, all made to meet. All the black clouds concentrated and brought together into one great tempest that it might rush and one tremendous tornado upon the person of the great Redeemer and substitute."

And let us not forget that our text says that it is none other then the Lord himself who has laid on him the iniquities of us all. It was then the Father himself who caused his Son to cry out at Calvary, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus as the representative of his people, the Lord Jesus has become responsible for their debts

and obligations to the divine justice and holiness and he has paid them all. As the scapegoat on whom the sins of Israel were laid on the Day of Atonement, so upon the Suffering Servant of Jehovah have been laid the sins of his sheep, and he has born them off into a land uninhabited as that goat was on that first Day of Atonement.

I come to the conclusion now. The first thing that stands out in these verses is the basic Christian truth that Christ's sufferings were substitutionary. About ten times in this passage that truth is affirmed. Notice the prophet's use of the pronouns our, we and us. Countless modern theologians have rejected the Biblical doctrine of propitiation, namely that righteousness and justice are attributes of the divine being and must be satisfied by a proper substitute if forgiveness and justification are to be received. Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam , and noted clergyman and one of the first six presidents elected by the World Council of Churches thought that such a view of God was loathsome and to him was an offense to his moral sense. In one of his writings he even implies though an illustration that such a God was a dirty bully.

I must say to those who reject the propitiation offered by Christ as Luther said to Erasmus, "Your thoughts of God are too human." Is such a work of Christ a just work? There is a fourfold support for thinking so. In the first place, the act of propitiation was an act of God and as Paul says,

"We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness for the passing over of sins that are past through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:24 through 26)

And second, it was a voluntary act on the part of the Son. Third, it was carried out in his relationship of union with the people of God and was no more immoral than a

husband's payments of his wife's debts. Finally, it was and is in perfect harmony with the divine plan of the fall under a covenantal head, Adam the first and of a restoration and redemption through another covenantal head, the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at Romans 5:12 through 21.

The final thing that stands out here is the sufficiency of his sufferings. "All we" to use the prophet's words, "have gone astray, but God has laid on him the iniquity of us all." The remedy corresponds to the perversity. Let me say a few words regarding the us of us all. I believe that atonement of Christ is infinite in value and sufficient for the salvation of every human being. If Christ had purposed to save all men, he would not have had to suffer one further pain, his atonement is sufficient to redeem the entire race, further I believe that a universal invitation to salvation is genuinely offered to every creature under heaven. And as an ambassador of Christ, I as a servant of him offer you that universal invitation to salvation through the blood of Christ shed on the cross.

At the same time, I believe that Christ paid the debts of the elect people of God. If he paid the debts of all, they are paid and no one can be called to account for them. If lost men are to be called to account, and Scripture plainly affirms this, then on what grounds can they be punished for the sins for which Christ has paid the penalty? Christ's redemption would then be a redemption that does not redeem.

At a great parliament of religions held at Chicago many years ago, practically every known religion was represented, and many were the learned discourses that were delivered. During one session, Dr. Joseph Cook a well known preacher of the city of Boston suddenly rose in the midst of the gathering and said,

"Gentlemen, I beg to introduce to you a woman with a great sorrow. Blood stains are on her hands, and nothing she has tried will remove them. The blood is that of murder, and nothing will take away the stain. She has been driven to desperation in her distress. Is there anything in your religion that will remove her sin and give her peace?"

A hush fell upon the gathering as the speaker turned from one to another for an answer. Not one of the company replied. Raising his eyes heavenward then, Dr. Cook dramatically cried out, "I will ask someone else, John, Apostle of Jesus Christ, can you tell this woman how to get rid of her awful sin?" The great preacher waited as if listening for a reply. And suddenly he cried, "Listen, John's speaking and he says the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin." Not a soul broke the silence. The representatives of Eastern religions, Western cults, and the deluders of apostolic Christianity sat dumb. In the face of human need they were without message or hope, the gospel of Christ alone meets our need. The sin of the race requires the blood of Calvary.

If you're listening to me at the present moment, I as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ appeal to you to recognize the evaluation of the word of God of you and your life. You're a sinner; you have proven you're a sinner by your sin, the sin of your heart and the sin of your acts. The remedy for your sin and the guilt and condemnation that sin entails is the blood of Christ shed on Calvary's cross. We invite you to him, we give you the marvelous promise of the gospel, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. May God help you to come to him and receive ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]