



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 53:6-9

“The Submissive Messiah”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our theme in this series of messages is the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah. And we’re looking at Isaiah chapter 53 verse 7 through verse 9, our subject is the submissive Messiah. So if you have your Bible with you, turn with me to Isaiah chapter 53 verse 7 through verse 9, and listen as we seek to expound the subject of the submissive Messiah from these verses.

Amid the ferment of the academic world, the unrest of the political world, as usual one might add, the confusion of the religious world, and in spite of the timidity of too many in the Christian world, there has hardly ever been a greater need for the preaching of old fashioned sin the substitutionary atonement and justification by blood and cross in electing grace. Today the church seems ashamed, perhaps fearful, or just plain embarrassed to so preach. Thirty years ago, the Reverend Doctor Sir George McCloud a noted liberal Church of Scotland theologian stated that the most ominous aspect of the church in the United States, Canada and Britain in his day was that “no one wanted to crucify.” He added, “possibly this is because there is nothing to be crucified about.

Another Scottish preacher and New Testament scholar has said some quite similar words somewhere. “It’s a terrible thing,” Professor James S. Stewart commented, “when the church is content to cultivate inoffensiveness. It is all to plain that when the church

finds itself in the worlds favor it is not functioning as a fruitful testimony to Christ.” Our Lord’s words in John 15 verse 17 through verse 25 make that very plain. [Indistinct] has said that “insecurity is the resetting of your wristwatch each time you see a clock that disagrees with it.” Sometimes I receive the impression from the evangelical church that possessed of overmastering desire to live in the territory of the consensus, it is willing to furl it sails of penetrating Pauline theology to do it.

Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse in a sermon on the five points of Calvinism once said, “If nobody thinks you’re queer, you’re not a good Christian.” He said that later after making the statement in one of his sermons, his wife said, “Please also Donald explain that if everybody thinks you’re queer you’re not a good Christian either.” Both of course were right.

This great passage concerning the Suffering Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah chapter 53 which we are expounding has been called the gospel in five words. Since it contains five poetic strophes. Chapter 52 verse 13 through verse 15, and then in the twelve verses of chapter 53, three verses throughout, four of them make up the other four of the strophes. It emphasizes all of the themes that seem so out of date these days. In verse 6, in verse 5 and verse 11, we have those themes of sin of substitutionary atonement and electing grace. They proclaim the same message that Paul preached in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he wrote, “For he hath made him, (that is Christ) to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The innocent was punished as if guilty that the guilty might be rewarded as if innocent. That could not be said of any mere martyr.

There can be no questioning the fact that this section of the prophecy has to do with the Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ. Philip the Evangelist in his meeting with the Ethiopian Eunuch states that Isaiah chapter 53 verses 7 and 8 which was the object of the Eunuch’s puzzlement was written of the Lord Jesus. Luke writes, “Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus.” Further, it’s clear

that Peter has this passage in mind since he either cites or alludes to verses 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 12 in 1 Peter 2:22 through 25 applying aspects of them all to the Lord Jesus Christ. And to top it off, it is generally agreed by New Testament scholars that John’s vision of the throne of God and of the slain lamb, also the lion of the tribe of Judah is traceable ultimately to Isaiah 53 and verse 7 and the clause, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,” which is itself probably derived from the Passover lamb of Exodus chapter 12. And since the revelation has come from God himself to John through Christ as he states in chapter 1 and verse 1, it’s accurate to say that God himself has confirmed the reference of Isaiah 53 to the Lord Jesus Christ the Messiah of Israel.

We turn now to the three verses of the fourth strophe of the fourth of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah songs Isaiah 53:7 through 9. The prophet in the first of the Old Testament statements writes in the 7th verse, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” Hugh Walpole it is said contended, “The wisest prophets make sure of the event first.” Edgar Casey, Jeane Dixon and other modern false prophets would do a whole lot better if they were able to do that, but unfortunately they are not as the results of their prophecies prove.

This 7th verse however is a true prophecy. It is so clearly a prophecy of Jesus Christ that the simplest student of Scripture can see it. It’s only the modern New Testament scholar and Old Testament scholar who assuming that prophecy is impossible insist that the New Testament writers tailored their accounts to make them agree with the Old Testament prophecies. Of course, it’s claimed, Jesus’ life was not a fulfillment of the prophecies that would be impossible since prophecy is impossible. In other words, those who have given us documents setting forth the high standard of moral life as well as spiritual truth of incomparable worth unraveled for almost twenty centuries, were deceitful, fraudulent flimflam artists. I ask such wary skeptics, who is the easy mark -- the patsy, the believer in fulfilled prophecy or the believer in the apostles as cunning

prevaricators obsessed with mythomania? And if such skeptics still stubbornly persist in their blindness, I challenge them to write something on a plane with the gospels in quality if men, mere men alone unaided by the Spirit of God can author such literature. They will not of course take up the gauntlet.

The silence of the serpent under oppression and affliction, likened by the prophet to a lamb to be slaughter and a sheep to be shorn is almost a unique thing in Old Testament life. The godly men of the Old Testament when under the strain of affliction, persecution and oppression generally broke out into one or two voices, the voice of guilt or the voice of doubtful complaint. Almost all the sufferers are loud under pain, mental and physical. Jacob, David and the prophets all are shining examples of this.

Why then is the servant so different? Well in the first place, he had no guilt to confess. Second, he knew a secret that we usually forget. With no doubts of his God and conscious of his sovereign control of all the affairs of life, he trusted in the confidence that his times were in his Father's hands. Even in the direst trial of life, when he cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” He made the Scripture the language of his question, as if he realized where he was and what he was undergoing, confirmed by his added words, “It is finished.” And further, notice, he addresses God not as oh God, oh God, but, “My God, my God.” His faith held fast, in the midst of his puzzlement over the divine guidance, no resentment, no stoicism and no argument with God characterizes him, only committal to, “Thy will be done.”

Now, the New Testament significance, the New Testament gives us a full picture of the silence of Jesus Christ. Before Caiaphas he held his peace, Mark 14:61. Before the chief priests he answered nothing, Mark 15:3. And in spite of Herod's desire to see him and observe him perform a miracle, Jesus answered him nothing, Luke 23:9. He was the Word of God, yet he remained silent. He spake as never man spake, but condemned their hopeless moral condition by baffling silence. The Apostle Paul may cry out in

complaint to the High Priest when he was under trial, but Jesus will not “give that which is holy to the dogs nor cast his pearls before swine,” as he exhorts his own disciples.

The 8th verse details his violent death. The Old Testament is quite difficult exegetically as the varied renderings of the verse indicate. The Authorized Version reads this way, “He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” The New American Standard Bible has it this way, “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 for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?” The general sense is clear at least, he was condemned by oppressive and unjust human law without proper complaints from the people of his generation although it was for the transgression of his people that he was stricken, a stroke that was really due them. To sum up, the death was undeserved, it was violent and it was an atonement by substitution so the Prophet Isaiah writes of the servant who was to come.

We turn again to the New Testament significance of the statement. That the death of Jesus Christ was undeserved is plainly declared in the New Testament. Frank Powell who made an intensive examination of the accounts concluded that the trial was both illegal and unjust. He has commented,

“There is a belief held throughout the centuries and shared by Jew and Gentile alike that the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and Son of God was thoroughly and patiently investigated by the Jewish Supreme Court and rejected only after mature deliberation. Our study should make it clear (he goes on to say) that there is no justification for this belief.”

Mr. Powell was for many years counsel for the central criminal court, the London sessions on the southeastern circuit and later a well known London magistrate. His book received wide commendation. In more recent years, Hiyam Cone, an Israel Supreme Court justice and an expert in the history of Jewish legal traditions has taken a rather novel approach to the matter. He concludes his study by contending that actually the Sanhedrin sought to save Jesus, hoping to enhance their own waning prestige by delivering a prophetic teacher beloved by the masses from the Romans. He said the Sanhedrin could find no one to testify favorably for Jesus and then sought to get him to plead not guilty of his claim to be the King of the Jews. Jesus refused however and so the trial had to run its course to death. Few have been persuaded by the thesis of judge cone. For one thing, there were several hundred persons who would have been willing to testify for him as the gospels and Paul claim. And of course Jesus could not deny that he was the King of the Jews, he holds that office and is the only one today who legitimately could sit on the Davidic throne.

The ninth verse is a verse concerning the burial of the Suffering Servant. The Old Testament statement again maybe rendered in several different ways, but for the sake of simplicity and I think for the sake of general accuracy, I'm going to take the New American Standard Bible's version as essentially correct. I've studied this in the Hebrew text, and I feel that this version has essentially the correct rendering of the Masoretic or Hebrew text. It reads, “His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth.”

There are some remarkable predictions in this chapter and another of them is found here. Crucifixion which originated probably with the Phoenicians was adopted later by both the Greeks and the Romans. It was contrary to Jewish law to practice it although the hanging of a dead body upon a cross was not uncommon as Deuteronomy 21:23 seems to suggest. It was the supreme Roman penalty Cicero in speech against

Verres calls it, *Sumum Suplicium*, or the extreme punishment. Thus it is striking that the Old Testament appears to anticipate the Messiah's death under Roman law by this method. One might at this point turn with some significance and with some interest to Psalm 22 and verse 15. In view of the curse pronounced upon any one hanged on a tree, a crucified Messiah, the Son of God as Hengel says, “must have seemed a contradiction in terms to anyone, Jew, Greek, Roman, or barbarian.” It would have seemed to them all foolish and offensive. It was a cruel and contemptible death, but that is the death that Jesus died for God's people.

The burial of our Lord then, represents a remarkable change of fortune. The authorities Isaiah says would assign him a death with wicked men, but he was actually buried in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea and a member also of the supreme council, a secret believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Josephus said that a blasphemer, one of the charges against our Lord should be buried in an ignominious and obscure manner. But God overruled the intentions of men and in our Lord's burial gave a hint of the coming glorification, tracing it to the fact that there was no deceit, no Jacob in his mouth or in his deeds for that matter.

When we turn to the New Testament for the significance of the fulfillment of this prophecy we see some very interesting things. The New Testament story of our Lord's burial is found in Matthew chapter 27:57 through 61 and John 19:38 through 42, and it's surely amazing. Two members of the Sanhedrin, the body that condemned him, Joseph of Arimathea the rich man and Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night, two naturally timid and cautious men nervely, bravely, and audaciously ask for the body of Jesus when it meant for them identification with the crucified criminal. It was a remarkable display of faith enshrined in the Scriptures as a magnificent testimonial to that which God does in the hearts of his men.

The question that at this point presses upon us for an answer is, how did this change of heart happen for these two men? What is the touch that breaks the bonds of

cowardice inflames the heart with devotion to another and leads to deeds of everlasting glory? Well we all know who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that it's the power that touched the spell of the cross of Christ. That Joseph who almost certainly was a spectator at the crucifixion was “good ground” to use our Lord's words of those who are made responsive to the word of God. Joseph was good ground and that came to full realization in the events surrounding the cross. He had been attracted to Jesus of Nazareth by the grace and power of his words and a feeble a flickering faith had been planted in his heart by God. He had bowed his heart before the Lord and confessed him as the king of his life. Joseph had believed unto righteousness. One might turn here to Romans chapter 10 and verse 10.

Yet that feeble and flickering faith lay hidden largely within his heart, for he was a secret disciple Scripture says. The Lord's awe inspiring miracles, his profound and meaningful sermons, his touching selflessness and poverty and above all, the pure holiness of his personal and moral life helped no doubt to build up Joseph in his faith, but they were insufficient to bring him to a bold and forthright confession of it before men. The day came however when Joseph with Nicodemus stood below the cross. There they saw in his suffering their guilt, for surely he was not suffering for his own sin, and a holy and omnipotent God would not possibly allow the only spotless man who only lived to suffer and die at the hands of the wicked were it not that he was a penal substitute for others. Then the irresistible power and appeal of his crimson love gripped the two weak disciples, and their little faith snapped its shackles and amid the shouts of praise from the angelic hosts, did its bold and loving and costly deed. It is as Joseph said within himself, “The sun has acknowledged him and covered its face in darkness,” for remember that it was darkness over the land while Jesus was hanging over the cross. There was also an earthquake, and Joseph thought, “The very earth itself has confessed him and shuddered in her heart over his infinite sufferings.” The veil of the temple you'll remember was rent and twain. So Joseph thought the temple has acknowledged him.

“And as if the Father himself were horror stricken at the wickedness of sinful men in crucifying him has rent its veil. Therefore, I will confess him too.”

As Mr. Spurgeon said, “The cross is a wondrous magnet drawing to Jesus every man of the true mettle.” I love that statement, for it’s so true, the cross is a wondrous magnet drawing to Jesus of the true mettle, every man who recognizes his sin and wishes to be redeemed from it and have the promise of everlasting life.

Matthew Arnold in earlier days had voiced ideas full of doubt, but when at last on his death bed he looked death in the face, he said, “The cross remaineth and in the straits of the soul it makes its ancient appeal.” He was thinking in terms of what he believed was the noblest of hymns, “When I survey the wondrous cross.”

As for others who also stood below the gibbet but were unmoved, we can only say that their hearts were stubborn in their sin. Perhaps the time of the Spirit’s working in invincible grace was yet to come for them, perhaps it would never come. I certainly hope that it would have come. “There are those who are of God,” the Lord Jesus said, “There are those who are of the truth,” he also said. But he also said that there were some who were not of God. Jesus made it very plain that there were some who do not hear his voice. But it can never be said that God is to be blamed. Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning put it so beautifully in a stanza that I think I’ve quoted before, “Earth’s crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes, the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries and daub their natural faces unaware, more and more from the first similitude.”

John Wesley who went to Georgia to convert the Indians discovered there that he was the unconverted one. Across the Atlantic he made the acquaintance with August Spanenberg a Moravian pastor. In his journal he records a conversation with him that deeply impressed him. “My brother,” said the devout and simple minded man whose counsel he had sought, “I must ask you one or two questions, do you know Jesus Christ?”

“I know,” replied Wesley after an awkward pause, “I know that he is the Savior of the world.”

“True,” answered the Moravian, “but do you know that he has saved you?”

“I hope he has died to save me,” Wesley responded.

The Moravian was evidently dissatisfied with these vague replies but he asked one more question, “Do you know yourself?”

“I said I did.” Wesley tells his readers in his journal, but then he adds, “But I fear they were vain words.”

May God help us to heed the vital lesson. If you're listening to me today, let me assure you that these marvelous prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ who has died for sinners. And if God in his marvelous grace has shown you that you are a sinner, you're a candidate for the salvation the Lord Jesus freely gives to sinners. He offered the atoning sacrifice that is sufficient for your sin. He paid the penalty of sinners; he paid all the penalty of sinners. And as I say, if God in his grace has shown you your need, come to Christ. Right now in your heart offer a prayer of thanksgiving to him for what he has done, confessing that you are a sinner, that you're thankful that Christ has died for sinners and that by God's grace you are going to trust the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross for your salvation. May the Lord God at this very moment cause you within your own heart ...