

GOD'S PLAN TO CONQUER EVIL AND SUFFERING—THE CROSS

INTRO For several weeks now, we have been examining the question: “Why does a good, All-Powerful and All-Knowing God, allow evil and suffering in the world?”

The declared reason there is evil and suffering is because of the fall of man; the disobedience and rebellion of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. The consequence of their sin not only brought a curse upon the earth—it also brought corruptness into the heart of every human being born since then.

Although God did not **create** evil—He created us with a free will and we chose to sin—God is great enough and powerful enough and wise enough that He can use evil and suffering **for good**. Two weeks ago, we looked at the life of Stephen in Acts 6 and 7 and saw how even in his death he brought glory to God. How? By some miraculous rescue? No; the evil and suffering that Stephen endured brought glory to God because he had a Christ-like love in the face of hatred. Like Jesus before him, his desire was that those who were killing him would be forgiven. “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” was his prayer as he was being stoned to death.

Countless examples of similar instances from Christian history could be given; allow me to share just one. A missionary from Australia by the name of Graham Staines left his homeland and served the lepers of India for 34 years. On January 23, 1999—just over 19 years ago—Graham and his two sons—ages 11 and 6—were burnt to death while sleeping in their jeep by a mob of militant Hindus. Graham’s wife, Gladys, and 13-year-old daughter Esther were now very much alone—except for God, that is. According to Randy Alcorn, Gladys’ response was printed on the front page of every major newspaper in India.

“I have only one message for the people of India,” Gladys wrote. “I’m not bitter. Neither am I angry. But I have one great desire: That each citizen of this country should establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who gave His life for their sins....Let us burn hatred and spread the flame of Christ’s love.” (Alcorn, 437). Greatness is ascribed to God—or at least ought to be—when a woman and daughter can forgive the killers of their husband and father.

In Hebrews 12 we are told to “look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.” The “joy that was set before Him” was not the cross—it was affording us the opportunity to be forgiven because of the cross. Jesus endured the cross—the suffering of it—and despised the shame—I believe a reference to being made sin for us—so that we could be justly forgiven.

Verse 3 is especially intriguing: “For consider Him (Jesus) that endured such contradiction (opposition) of sinners against Himself. The NASB reads like this: “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself.” Why are we to consider Jesus and how He suffered hostility—opposition—from sinners? Because it will encourage us not to be weary or to faint. Jesus was not exempt from suffering; in fact, He was the Supreme sufferer—and consequently knows what suffering is all about.

Please **turn to** Isaiah 53. As we look at this chapter today, I believe we should be impressed by at least 3 things: 1) The **accuracy** of predictive prophecy. Isaiah was probably written around 740 BC—773 years before the cross. Isaiah’s accurate description demonstrates God not only knows the future—He also brings it to pass 2) The **depth** of Christ’s love for us seen in what He went through for us 3) God’s **holiness** and hatred for sin. We cannot look at the cross w/o realizing God hates sin and punishes sin.

Notice first,

1. Christ's Substitution for Us

--v 4 "our griefs;" "our sorrows"

--v 5 "our transgressions;" "our iniquities;" "chastisement of our peace;" "with His stripes we are healed"

--v 6 "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all"

--v 8 (last part) "for the transgression of my people was He stricken"

--v 9 "because He had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in His mouth"

Impossible to miss the fact that this Suffering Servant was not dying for Himself—He was dying for the sins of others!

A. Concept of Substitution seen in the OT sacrificial system

The OT offering of animal sacrifices required that the person bringing the sacrifice "laid his hands" upon the animal that was to be sacrificed, symbolizing a transfer of the guilt **from** the offerer **to** the animal who was to die in his place. The death of the innocent animal did not "pay" for the sin of the guilty person; Hebrews 10:4 reminds us that "It is not possible that the blood of bulls or goats should take away sins." The sacrifice of the animal was merely a temporary covering for sin until the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world" should come.

B. Jesus stated He was dying for others

In Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, we read these words from the lips of Jesus: "For the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." In John 15:13, Jesus said "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

C. The NT plainly states that Christ's death was for us

Romans 5:6-8 "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

⁸ But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

II Corinthians 5:21 "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Galatians 3:13 "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us:"

I Peter 3:18 "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God"

God's plan to conquer evil and suffering was to provide His Son as our substitute to pay the sin-debt that we owe. We want to be relieved from evil and suffering NOW; Jesus died for us so that we can be free from evil and suffering ETERNALLY! We are sinful and "the wages of sin is death"—eternal separation from God. The only way to escape that punishment is to have someone else pay that sin-debt—but that Someone had to be sin-free. That Someone—Jesus Christ—lovingly and willingly came to earth to die for my sins and for yours.

Let's pause here for a moment: What is your plan to get to heaven? How do you hope to have your sins forgiven by God? God's plan—the only plan that matters because it is **His** heaven—is that Christ would be our substitute. Are you trusting what Jesus did for you on the cross to take away your sin—or are you counting on what you are doing for yourself to take away your sin? If you are counting on your baptism or catechism or church membership or being kind and good and never hurting anyone, you are counting on **you** and fighting against God's plan. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life...no one gets to the Father but by Him (John 14:6).

2. Second, notice **Christ's Suffering for Us**

Not only is there an emphasis on Christ's substitution in these verses, it is impossible to miss the **suffering** Jesus endured while being our substitute.

A. Jesus suffered physical pain

--v 4 "we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted"

--v 5 "He was wounded...he was bruised..." and "stripes"—whippings—were laid on Him

--v 10 "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;"

Think with me for a moment about the physical pain Jesus suffered for you and me. From head to toe, His entire body was affected.

--A crown of thorns was placed on His head, then they "took the reed and smote Him on the head" (Mt 27:29)

--His cheeks had the hair plucked off (Isaiah 50:6)

--He suffered incredible thirst—"my tongue cleaveth to my jaws" we are told in Ps 22:15

--His back was scourged; whips imbedded with sharp objects made stripes--furrows—of His back

--His hands and feet were pierced we read in Ps 22:16

--His bones were pulled out of joint as His weight was held by nails in His hands and feet

Do not think for a moment that Jesus does not know about physical pain!

B. Jesus suffered mental anguish and rejection

--v 3 "He is despised and rejected of men"

--"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"

--"he was despised and we esteemed him not"

Think of the mockery Jesus endured. Matthew 27:41-43 "Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴² He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."

--v 7 "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth"

--v 10 "He hath put Him to grief"

--v 11 "He shall see of the travail of his soul"

Christ's grief—the travail of His soul—occurred not only because of the **physical** suffering and torture Jesus went through, but the **mental** anguish of being made sin for us. When God laid our sin on Christ, the Father turned His face away. Jesus' response of "My God, my God, why hast thou forsake me?" (Mt 27:46) demonstrates God's hatred for sin—and Jesus' suffering hell on our behalf so we don't have to.

Alcorn writes: Why did Jesus suffer six hours on the cross instead of six minutes or just six seconds? "Perhaps as a reminder that suffering is a process. God does not end our suffering as soon as **we** would like. He did not end his Son's suffering as soon as **he** would have liked. We stand in good company" (209). Later he makes this statement: "History's worst event happened to history's best person" (213).

Oh, how thankful we should be that Jesus went through with the Cross and stayed on the cross and did not ask to come down from the cross. "He could've called 10 thousand angels" and been delivered, but instead He endured the shame of being seemingly unloved and unwanted by God. Jesus' seeming **weakness** in being put to death was really a demonstration of the **power** of His love!

C. Jesus suffered death for us

I point that out primarily for this reason: Scoffers suggest that Jesus didn't really come back to life because He never really died—He was merely unconscious for 3 days and then resuscitated—not resurrected. God, of course, knew ahead of time that there would be those who would deny His ability to resurrect Christ and used Isaiah to emphasize the fact that Jesus **died**.

--v 7 "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter...." The significance of the OT sacrificial system was that the innocent animal **died** in place of the guilty offerer. A lamb brought to the slaughter was killed—not released. --v 8 (middle) "for He was cut off out of the land of the living" most certainly points to death

--v 9 "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death"

At the time of Jesus' death, crucifixion was reserved for the worst of criminals. The first part of the verse was fulfilled by **how** He died—as a wicked criminal; the second part of the verse was fulfilled by **where** His body was placed after He died.

Matthew 27:57-60 "When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. ⁵⁹ And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed."

--v 10 (middle) "He hath put Him to grief: when though shalt make His soul an offering for sin" Again, offerings for sin meant a death. We will look at this more this afternoon, but we also see a subtle prediction of the resurrection in verse 10: "he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days..." How can a dead man see his seed—his offspring—and have his days prolonged, if he remains dead?

--v 12 (middle) "...because He hath poured out his soul unto death"

Jesus suffered physical torture, the rejection of both men and God, and ultimately death for one reason: to make salvation possible by paying for the penalty of our sin.

3. Our Salvation Possible because of Christ's Death

A. Christ died for sin

So far in this chapter we've noticed an emphasis on Christ's substitution for us and His suffering for us. A third thing that is impossible to miss is the fact that Christ's suffering as our Substitute was for one reason: **sin**.

--v 5 "wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities"

--v 6 (last part) "and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all"

--v 8 (last part) "for the transgression of my people was He stricken."

--v 10 (middle) "thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin"

--v 11 (end) "for He shall bear their iniquities."

--v 12 (end) "and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Going through these verses I couldn't help but think of this phrase from the song, "How Deep the Father's Love for Us:"

It was my sin that held Him there, Until it was accomplished

His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished!

B. Salvation available to all because Christ died for all

One debate among theologians is **who** Christ died for: everyone...or just those who are saved? I believe God's Word teaches an unlimited atonement—meaning Jesus died for the sins of **all** mankind—and that salvation is **available** to all.

--Notice again v 6 "**All** we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned **every one** to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him—God hath laid on Jesus—the iniquity of us **all**."

--**John 3:16** "For God so loved the **world**"

--**II Cor 5:19** "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the **world** unto Himself,"

--**Heb 2:9** "That He [Jesus] by the grace of God should taste death for **every man**."

--**I John 2:2** "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the **whole world**." Since Jesus died for all, does that mean **all** will be saved? No; Christ's death is sufficient to save all but is efficient—effective—only for those who believe. Stated another way, the atonement is not limited but the application of it is.

C. Salvation **applied** to only some

--v 11 (mid) "by His knowledge"—by the knowledge of Him—"shall my righteous servant (Jesus Christ) justify **many**" (doesn't say **all** because not all are justified)

--v 12 (last part) "and He bare the sin of **many**"

Some of you might be thinking—and rightly so—how come it says He died for all in verse 6, but only many here in verse 12? The answer in my mind is pretty simple—God wanted to make sure you and I understand that just because Jesus died for all, it does not mean every one will go to heaven.

We must never forget the fact that Jesus Himself said "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat" (Mt 7:13).

So, who does God justify? Who does He treat as though they had never sinned? Who does He forgive and make His children?

I John 5:12 "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

How do we **get** the Son? How do we have Him? How does He become our Savior? John 1:12 "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power—the authority—to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name."

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. Who do you look to when you go through trials and suffering? Don't look to yourself or another person—look to the Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith" and "consider Him who endured the opposition of sinners." As you look at Jesus, remember the big picture. Jesus can bring good out of your suffering—just as He brought good out of His suffering. He knows what suffering is all about and asks us to come "boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

2. Are you saved? Have you been declared righteous by God? It doesn't matter what people say of you or think of you—what does God **know** about you? Are you yet in your sin—unforgiven—one heart-beat from hell? Jesus died to save you. Won't you come to Him today?