

AT THE CROSS

ISAIAH 53:4-6

It was Martin Luther who rightly wrote, “[If you want to understand the Christian message you must start with the wounds of Christ.](#)” The cross of Jesus is the crux of Christianity. In fact, the term *crux* is from *crucifixion*.

And outside of the four NT Gospels there is no clearer account of Messiah’s crucifixion than Isaiah 53.

Realize the Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, was writing 700 years in advance of Mount Calvary - 200 years before crucifixion was invented by the Persians - and 500 years before it was employed by Rome. Yet Isaiah paints an amazingly vivid and detailed prophetic account of all that Jesus endured to take away our sin.

In fact, this passage from the Jewish Scriptures is so obviously and authoritatively Christian in its message, later Jews conspired to eliminate it from their Bibles.

[Ashkenazi, or European Jews](#), omitted Chapter 53 from their editions of Isaiah. [Sephardic, or Eastern Jews](#), retained it, but tried to explain it away by relating it to the nation Israel rather than a personal Messiah.

Yet God refuses to let His people ignore Isaiah’s testimony. Today, in the Givat Ram neighborhood of Jerusalem - at the heart of the city and the modern state - across the street from the Israeli Knesset - there is a unique structure known as [The Shrine of the Book](#). The building is part of the Israeli Museum. And it’s white dome is shaped like the lid of an ancient ceramic jar. Two-thirds of the building is under the ground.

And on display there is THE most important archaeological discovery of all time - *what was found in those jars, the Dead Sea Scrolls* - particularly the [Isaiah Scroll](#) - is the oldest biblical manuscript we have, a complete copy of Isaiah dating back to 200 BC. These scrolls are proof the Bible we read today has been passed down reliably for at least 2000 years.

And right in the middle of the Isaiah Scroll we find Chapter 53 - *it’s there for all the world to see, and read, and study*. Today, you can even access it online!

At the heart of Jerusalem, at the very center of the Jewish nation, God has planted undeniable, biblical evidence that what Jesus did on Calvary’s cross was Yahweh’s timeless remedy for the sin of all mankind.

Tonight, let's read these ancient words once again, Isaiah 53:4-6, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

On display in Rome, within St. Peter's Basilica, is Michelangelo's masterpiece, *The Pieta*. The famous sculpture depicts Mary, holding in her arms the body of her crucified Son. The sculpture is so life-like. When you see it, you're amazed that so much passion and tenderness could be captured in a chunk of cold stone.

Once a tour group was standing in front of the world famous sculpture when a little girl whispered to her mother, "What in the world have they done to Jesus?"

The mom put her finger to her lips to tell her little girl to be quiet, but the girl was too wrapped up in what she was seeing. She repeated her question, even shouted it out, "What in the world have they done to Jesus?"

And when I read Isaiah 53 I ask the same question. How could people be that cruel? - that calloused? What were they thinking when they hammered the spikes through His flesh, and raked the scourge across His back? What kind of madness possessed these people? *What in the world have they done to Jesus?*

Isaiah tells us in verse 4, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." Realize, the cross was a collision of motives. What drove the Jews and what prompted Rome, was not God's objective...

Jewry was jealous of Jesus. Rome was scared of His popularity. But God had a different plan all together for allowing events to culminate in Jesus' crucifixion. What was punishment **to the Romans**, and a divine curse **to the Jews** - was **to God** an act of mercy and sacrifice.

As we discussed Sunday, on the cross God vented His righteous wrath and desire for justice - on His only Son Jesus. On the cross Jesus took the place of sinful humanity and accepted our punishment. On that cross Jesus became responsible for the fallen world humans created. He "*bore our griefs*" and "*carried our sorrows.*"

And verse 5 adds, "He was **wounded** for our transgressions..." The term "**wounded**" means "*pierced or perforated.*" The crucifixion punctured the body of Jesus in at least seven places - the nails in His two hands and two feet, the crown of thorns in His

brow, the scourge across His back, the spear in His side! Jesus was *stuck* to rescue people who are *stuck in sin*.

Then “He was **bruised** for our iniquities...” The Hebrew word “bruised” can be translated “*beaten to pieces*.” Recall how the Jews plucked out Jesus’ beard and slapped Him in the face with their open hand. They battered Jesus’ face until it became grossly disfigured.

Yet it was “**for our transgressions**” and “**for our iniquities**.” It wasn’t just the Romans or Jews who nailed Jesus to the cross. He bore in His body *my sin*, and *your sin*... Charles Spurgeon exhorts us to take the cross personally, and absorb it emotionally, “Stand at the foot of the cross, and count the purple drops by which you have been cleansed: see the thorn-crown; mark His scourged shoulders, still gushing with encrimsoned rills... And if you do not lie prostrate on the ground before that cross, you have never seen it.”

Once a little boy went to church with his dad on Easter. His father wanted to teach Him the significance of the holiday. The dad said to his son, “Jesus died because people nailed Him to a cross.” That’s when the little guy’s eyes got wide. He looked out over the sanctuary, and said, “You mean *these people*?” And the correct answer would’ve been “*Yes, these people*.”

For Isaiah says, “**the chastisement for our peace was upon Him...**” This phrase, “**The chastisement**” referred to the formal beating Jesus took. He was pummeled with a leather whip. As many as nine straps, laced with bits of jagged metal or ivory targeted Jesus’ torso. The lash dug into His skin, tore His flesh, and eventually churned up His muscle. The custom was 39 strikes. When the executioner was done Jesus’ back and legs resembled scraps of leftover turkey after Thanksgiving dinner - *once the carver had finished*. This Roman scourging was known by the ancients as “**the half-way death**.” Some victims never made it to the cross.

And this is why whenever we take communion I make myself chew and grind the bread between my teeth longer than I’d like. I personally need to recall the crushing and chewing and grinding He endured for me.

It’s been said, “**What God's justice demanded, God's love provided**.” God’s Son could’ve been born in the era of the guillotine, or firing squad, or lethal injection, but He was subjected to crucifixion - the most hideous form of execution ever devised. **For that’s what our sin deserved!** *Why did His Father choose the cross?*

There were two reasons... **First**, it was to show *the severity of humanity’s sin*. But **second**, it was to demonstrate *the extremity of God’s love*. It’s been said, “*In the cross*

of Christ excess in men is met by excess in God; excess of evil is mastered by excess in love.”

And we’re told “by His stripes we are healed...” The “*stripes*” were the lacerations caused by the scourging. The terrible pain Jesus endured becomes our healing.

1 Peter 2:24 tells us, “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by His stripes you were healed.” All our healing - *physical, and mental, and relational, even spiritual healing* - was paid for on the cross. Jesus’ stripes purchased for us a great treasure.

Yet this doesn’t mean bodily healing is as accessible to us now as is the forgiveness of sin... *Just ask and you’re healed!* No, on the cross all our eternal blessings were paid for by Jesus. He purchased streets of gold, mansions in heaven, a redeemed world, the healing of nations, etc., etc. - but cashing in on those blessings is now a matter of *God’s timing*.

And likewise with our physical healing. Today is the day of salvation. God promises to forgive us the instant we repent, but He may or may not heal us right away. You may not be healed until you get to heaven, *but when it does happen you’ll know it was paid for by the stripes they laid to the body of God’s only Son Jesus.*

Verse 6, it says it **all!** Notice, the verse begins and ends with the word, “**all.**” “**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.**”

“**All we like sheep...**” Sheep are notoriously stupid. They tend to wander away and stray from the fold...

Which means a person doesn’t have to be blatant and rowdy to be a sinner. Like a dumb sheep you can just wander off. *Often people let curiosity take over and they venture out on their own;* then before they know it they’re trapped in trouble, and need a Shepherd.

Verse 6 is actually speaking of two sheep: the one who goes astray, but also **the scapegoat**. Isaiah 53 is referencing a ritual practiced by the Jews on Yom Kippur, or their Day of Atonement. This was the time of the year when the sin of the whole nation was forgiven.

Leviticus 16 instructs the High Priest to select two goats. One was offered as a sacrifice. The other animal was taken to the edge of the camp. There the High Priest would lay his hand on its head and confess the sins of the people. He would then turn it loose to wander into the desert. This was called a “**scapegoat.**”

Today the term “scapegoat” is a cliché for any person who takes the blame. But this was what Jesus literally did for us on the cross! He took the blame for our sin.

This why we speak of the death of Jesus Christ as *substitutionary*. Our sin was laid on Jesus’ innocent shoulders. He died in our place. He became our proxy. As the poet writes, “Upon a life I have not lived. Upon a death I have not died. Another's life, Another's death. I stake my whole eternity.” This is our salvation.

Again to reiterate, when Jesus was executed it wasn’t because of any evil He had done. He was bearing our sin. *Our foul-ups - our rebellious acts - all the little sins that go unnoticed by everyone other than God - all the sins we commit because we’re so use to committing them we don’t even recognize them as sin* - Jesus bore **all our sin** on His sinless shoulders.

All our junk - *in fact, the garbage of the whole world* - was collected in one can and shoved onto Jesus’ truck.

Imagine, the frightful moment when that heavy load fell on Him all at once. The sin of the whole world was thrust onto a man who’d never known a single sin. *The sin of the rapist, the serial killer, the extortionist, the child molester, the suicide bomber, the abortionist...*

Even *your sin* and *my sin* - was gathered up together and thrust onto the crucified Christ. We’ll never grasp the shock that was to His system, and the pain He felt.

This is why it’s foolish to think that you or I or anyone else can ever be good enough to get to heaven. **If you could be, then Jesus died in vain.** *Do you think an Almighty God would allow His only Son to suffer a brutal crucifixion unless it was absolutely necessary?*

It reminds me of the man who spent his whole life ignoring Jesus. He figured since he’d never robbed a bank, or murdered anybody, He didn’t belong in hell. He was sure God would make an exception for him.

Then one night this man had a dream. He was standing in line at heaven’s gate, right behind Mother Teresa. Here was a woman who had sacrificed all her worldly comforts to minister selflessly to the poorest of the poor on the streets of Calcutta. The man’s heart sank when he heard the angel say, “**Sorry Teresa, we were expecting a lot more out of you!**” Not even Mother Teresa can measure up to God’s standard on her own.

This is why Isaiah says, “**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way...**” Every mother’s child of us is guilty before God... This is why you and I desperately need Jesus!

I believe everybody knows intuitively that sin carries a serious penalty! Thus, we punish ourselves. People adopt destructive behavior patterns because they don't think they deserve the goodness God offers. They don't reach out for help because they feel so unworthy.

Some of you have been beating yourself up for years. You're haunted by feelings of inadequacy. Yet please realize, you can punish yourself over and over, but you'll never make the feelings of guilt go away. Isaiah says only **"By His stripes we are healed."**

Jesus bore in His body the punishment for the evil we've done. We need to accept the fact that to punish ourselves any longer is to belittle and doubt the work of Christ. It's time for us to lay down our guilt at the cross, and trust once and for all in Jesus' permanent pardon.

In his classic book **"Pilgrim's Progress,"** John Bunyan tracks his main character, Christian, and writes metaphorically of the liberating moment in every believer's life. **"I saw that just as Christian came up to the Cross, his burden loosed from his shoulders, fell off his back, and landed in the grave. Then was Christian glad and lightsome - and said with a merry heart, 'He's given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.'"**

The great church father, Jerome, lived in Bethlehem solely because it was the birthplace of Jesus. He labored daily to make himself worthy of God's favor.

But then one night he had a dream where Jesus paid him a visit. Jerome collected all his money and offered it as a gift. But Jesus said, **"I don't want your money."**

He rounded up his possessions and offered them to Jesus. But Jesus said, **"I don't want your possessions."**

Frantically, Jerome turned to Jesus and asked, “*Lord, what can I give you? What do you want?*” Jesus replied, “*Give me your sin. That’s what I came for; I came to take away your sin. Give me your sin.*”

And this is what Jesus wants from us tonight... In your heart of hearts, will you come to the cross *and behold the Man suffering there for you?* If you’ll believe and roll your burden (*whatever it is, no matter how heavy it’s gotten*) onto Jesus’ shoulders, **a change will occur!** You’ll be different. You’ll be *glad and lightsome*.

Turn your sin and your burdens over to Jesus once and for all, and you’ll be forgiven and set free. The moment you trust in *His stripes...* *His healing begins!*

Remember the words of the famous hymn, “*At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away, it was there by faith I received my sight, and now I am happy all the day!*”

Tonight we’re going to literally come to the cross and take communion. I believe God wants to meet us here. There is pardon, healing, and freedom **at the cross!**