

IN MY PLACE CONDEMNED HE STOOD - The Biblical Pattern of the Atonement - Part seven - Sunday, July 10th, 2022

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WE'VE SEEN A LAMB SUBSTITUTED FOR A MAN. NOW WE SEE A MAN SUBSTITUTED FOR A LAMB

Isaiah 52:13-53:6, 10-12 - “Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. [14] As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—[15] so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand....[53:1]...Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? [2] 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, and no beauty that we should desire him.[3] He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.[4] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. [6] 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....[Isaiah 53:10] Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Do you see those strong words in **verse 12? - “Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet *he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*” - IPAD TEXT**

So strong is the reference to ***substitutionary atonement*** - “....**he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors**” - that they are deliberately left out in the public reading of the Scriptures in many synagogues. Frequently, in their lectionary readings of the prophets, rabbis will literally read up to Isaiah 53:11, and on the following Sabbath pick up with Isaiah 54:1.

The explanation for the omission is usually that this verse is too easily misunderstood in the way it can lead people to picture a Messiah who dies and suffers for the sins of the people and who actually overcomes death to “***make intercession for the people***” following his sacrifice. And those rabbis are right. It is **very** easy, indeed, to interpret this verse in exactly that way. In fact, if you **reject** that teaching, about all you **can** do is leave verses like this out of your public reading of the text.

There’s a special reason for including this text in our study of the background, prophetic Old Testament passages on the meaning and nature of the atonement. This text marks a key shift in God’s divine unfolding of the ***kind*** of work He would do in the atonement.

We studied the Passover celebration in Exodus chapter 12. The wrath of God **passes over** the places where the Passover lamb was sacrificed according to instruction. **All** people were exposed to the wrath of God. The first nine plagues were **automatically selective** in their target. Not so with the tenth plague. **Everyone** is in danger of God's wrath - Egyptian and Israelite alike. The lamb dies or the first born. Everyone learns what God wants them to learn. Sin matters. Things are different **after** people sin than they were **before** they sinned. Sin brings God's wrath.

Then we studied the ritual of the day of atonement in Leviticus chapter 16. This time there are two goats, one slain and one released into the wilderness after the sins of the people were confessed over it. A price for sin is paid - one goat must die because the wages of sin is death. And sins are **removed** and **carried away** - the scape-goat removes the sins from the midst of the people.

Now, in **Isaiah 52 and 53** we turn an important corner in divine revelation. For the first time, the focus of the sacrifice shifts from **animals** to a **person**. This is striking when you think it through. Up to this point in the Old Testament account, the substitution has always been in the **opposite** direction - moving from the **guilty sinner** to the **innocent animal** - from **person** to **lamb**, or **goat**, or **bull**.

Now, the text is pointing **away** from these innocent **animals** to the holy **person** they pre-figured. God is pulling back the curtain further and further as people come to understand the concepts of divine wrath, substitution, and atonement. As the people start to have their minds accustomed to **one** layer of truth, He starts to set the scene for another, more complete revelation. All of those slain animals and the celebrations of the **Passover** and the **Day of Atonement pointed to something beyond themselves.** And our first complete prophetic glimpse of what they pointed **to** is the theme of today's text.

I hope you make your mind alert to what's happening in God's revelation. What we're studying in this teaching is huge. It's the **reason** you have an Old Testament in your Bible. It's the reason there are 66 books instead of just 27. We need to know God's **method** of giving us His redemptive truth.

Why didn't God send Jesus to redeem sinners right after Adam and Eve sinned? He knew the mess we'd all be in. Couldn't Jesus have come and died immediately? Surely His death would have been redemptively effective for all who would be born **after** His death, just as it is effective for the millions who have died in the last 2000 years. So why the long pause in redemptive history?

And the answer to that question is God's wise and tender love. He knew this fallen world was not only **wicked**, but **mentally dense** to the nature of divine rescue. He knew the concept of **substitutionary atonement** wasn't easily digested by proud, sinful people. So in His mercy, God **prepares** us for the entry of this truth by **pre-figuring** it in the kinds of visible history lessons we've been studying in this series.

And even after centuries of divine hints and clues and lessons, when Jesus **did** come in human flesh and nature, people **still** didn't grasp the reason for His coming. The whole Jewish existence in the Old Testament and system of worship given to them was designed to lead them to **embrace** Jesus, the Christ - which means Jesus the **Messiah** - and they use the very system God gave to **prepare** for the Messiah to **reject** Jesus to this day!

So what do we learn about the atonement from the Servant song in Isaiah? What does it contribute specifically to our understanding of the Atonement and the wrath of a just God against our sin? Or, in the words of the title of this entire series, what does the prophet Isaiah contribute to our understanding of the way wrath and mercy meet in the glorious work of the atonement?

- 1) **THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS PAINTED IN TERMS THAT ARE HORRIFIC RATHER THAN ATTRACTIVE**

IPAD TEXT - Isaiah 52:13-15 - “Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. [14] As many were astonished at you--*his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance*, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind--so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.”

We're meant immediately to notice the contrast between what the Servant ***accomplishes*** and the way the Servant ***looks***. In His ***accomplishments*** He acts “***wisely***” and shall be “***high and lifted up***” and “***exalted***”(13). But in His ***appearance*** He is “***marred beyond human semblance***”(14).

Don't slide too quickly over those last words. The prophet is saying you would have to look twice at this Servant to actually reinforce in your own mind that He was a normal person. This servant is not the kind of person you would want to walk up to at a party and start a conversation. His appearance would shake you up. You'd move on to someone else just to avoid eye to eye contact with this Servant.

So immediately we're confronted with the look of a body that's gone through something terribly disfiguring. This is the broken body of a grotesque crucifixion. True, the Servant is highly exalted and lifted up. But it has all come at a terrible price.

Then we have this sparkling little detail. The Servant's blood wasn't just **spilled**, it is said to "**sprinkle many nations**"(15a). And we're immediately taken back to that Passover lamb. The lamb isn't just killed randomly. The **blood** is applied to the house. Or think of the first of those two goats of atonement in Leviticus 16. The blood of that goat was sprinkled all over the holy place and the altar. Only the blood of this suffering Servant isn't just for one particular tribe or race. It's global in scope and power. It's for all the nations of the earth.

2) **THE SERVANT IS DESPISED AND REJECTED IN SPITE OF HIS LOVING WORK**

IPAD TEXT - Isaiah 53:1-3 - “Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?[2] 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, and no beauty that we should desire him.[3] He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

The prophet braces us with the advance warning that the response of those for whom the Servant suffered is unbelievable - so unbelievable that even though we are ***told*** the truth, we don't accept it.

At first it looks like no more than a repetition of what we've already been told about the appearance of the suffering Servant. But there *is* something different - something ***very*** different. Suddenly the prophet brings the collective guilt of the people into the foreground. Notice the sudden appearance of the “***we***” references - “....***no form or majesty that we should look at him....no beauty that we should desire him....we esteemed him not.***”

This continues into the New Testament - **John 12:32-38** - **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”** [33] He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. [34] So the crowd answered him, **“We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”** [35] So Jesus said to them, **“The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. [36] While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”** When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. [37] **Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, [38] so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”** - **IPAD TEXT**

This is Isaiah's point. There is nothing **rational** in this rejection of Jesus. John is careful to point out that it was after Jesus performed miracles of power and grace - after He had shown His hand and done nothing but bless the people - **this** was the time they refused to place trust and faith in Him. How many times we hear the excuse that someone **would** believe if only they could have walked with Jesus personally and witnessed His grace and love. The New Testament confirms this is not the case.

Isaiah predicted all of this. He carefully **implicates** us in the rejection of the Messiah. To this day, rejection of Jesus is **spiritual** rather than **intellectual**. So Jesus reveals both the love and mercy of God and the blinding effects of human sin and guilt at the same time. In this way, God **provides** atonement and **reveals the need for it** at the same time. Behold the power and wisdom of our God!

3) **GOD LAID OUR SINS ON THE SUFFERING SERVANT**

IPAD TEXT - Isaiah 53:4-6 - “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. [6] 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.”

Now the prophet unfolds more specifically exactly *how* a holy God deals with our sins. And the principle of *substitution* lies at the heart of the explanation.

Here’s why this is important. There is a growing voice among evangelicals that would see God’s involvement in the crucifixion, but in a different way than the prophet sets forth. A growing number of progressive writers and bloggers see God coming *along side us in love* rather than *taking our place in substitution*.

The idea here is that God knows what it’s like to go through the pain of living in a troubled world. He can relate to your problems. He knows rejection and hatred. He knows the ache of being misunderstood. He knows loneliness and the cold that comes from being unloved.

And surely this is all true. We have a high priest who can fully sympathize with our temptations and struggles. And for this we should be eternally thankful. But none of this loving, sympathetic heart of Jesus **atones** for my sin. There's a crucial difference between **understanding** my sin and **atonement** for it. Christ's priestly ministry on my behalf is the **result** of His atoning work, not the **source** of it.

No. Isaiah isn't describing God **coming along side** of us in our sin, but **taking our place** in bearing the consequences of it - **Isaiah 53:5-6** - **"But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. [6] 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."** - **IPAD TEXT**

That this was not just a matter of the Servant suffering along **with** us is made clear in the way the prophet describes the **exchange** that takes place through the Servant's suffering work. He doesn't just **join** our suffering. He **exchanges** His peace for our **chastisement** - His **healing** for our **stripes**. This is the clearest way Isaiah could picture the **result** of the Servant **substituting** Himself in our place.

Notice again **verse 6 - “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.” - IPAD TEXT**

This sets forth the **need** for the Servant’s suffering work. **He** didn’t go astray. **We** did. He isn’t dying because of **His** sins, but because of mine. That’s what Isaiah means when he says the **“Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

This is why the argument used by many Jewish interpreters of the Servant’s Songs in Isaiah breaks down. They insist that the Suffering Servant is **Israel**. But this misses the point entirely. Israel is suffering in Babylon precisely because she **was** sinful. But Isaiah’s Suffering Servant suffers because He **wasn’t** sinful. He was the substitute offering for **our** sins. **And that’s why Jesus Himself, in John chapter 12, makes it absolutely clear that Isaiah was prophesying about Him.**

And the Israelites had been taught for hundreds of years - every spring and every fall - on their two great national holidays - **Passover** and the **Day of Atonement** - about the need for a substitute to carry away the guilt and punishment of their sin.

- 4) **THE WILL OF THE FATHER AND THE WILL OF THE SON ARE ONE AND THE SAME IN THE ATONEMENT**

IPAD TEXT - Isaiah 53:10-12 - “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. [11] Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Whose will is it for the Servant to die? Is it the Father's or the Son's sacrifice? And Isaiah is careful to unfold the *whole* story of the atonement. Most of us cut our teeth knowing the lyrical wording of **John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”- IPAD TEXT.** God loves and God gives. But what *else* does the Bible say?

There's more. Much, much more - **John 10:17-18 - "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."- IPAD TEXT**

The Father doesn't just love the *world*. He deeply loves the *Son*. And He loves the Son because the Son *lays down His own life*. There is a perfect harmony of will and desire. This is exactly what we'd expect among the exercise of activity of the Triune God.

This is what Isaiah hails as majestic and wonderful beyond telling. O, the blindness - the *unbelief* - of those who would dare to disgrace the Almighty by calling the cross "*cosmic child abuse*"! How this ignores the passionate love and commitment of the Son to reach the lost with His own blood. Remember, *Jesus* is the Lamb of God (notice again the blending of divine wills) who takes away the sin of the world.

Only the full-blooded Scriptural doctrine of the substitutionary, wrath-bearing, sin-removing atonement honors both the spotless justice and boundless love of the whole Triune God for a guilty sinner. This is our greatest joy.