

**Isaiah 53:10-12 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and to allow him to suffer. Because you made his life a guilt offering, he will see offspring. He will prolong his days, and the LORD's gracious plan will succeed in his hand. <sup>11</sup>After his soul experiences anguish, he will see the light of life. He will provide satisfaction. Through their knowledge of him, my just servant will justify the many, for he himself carried their guilt. <sup>12</sup>Therefore I will give him an allotment among the great, and with the strong he will share plunder, because he poured out his life to death, and he let himself be counted with rebellious sinners. He himself carried the sin of many, and he intercedes for the rebels.**

In the Gospel lesson for today Jesus tells the disciples very bluntly what was going to be happening to him soon. There are no metaphors or picture language. They are going to Jerusalem. He will be betrayed, condemned, beaten, and executed. On Easter Sunday he will rise again. He is going to be fulfilling everything that the Prophet Isaiah and so many others said he would do.

Jesus was barely done speaking when the brothers James and John came up to Jesus and asked for specific places of honor in heaven. They missed the point entirely. Jesus just talked about how he was going to humble himself in ways that we can't even imagine, but those two disciples were only thinking about personal glory. In the second lesson for today the Apostle Paul shows the opposite attitude. He is willing to step out of his comfort zone so that he can have every opportunity to talk to people about Jesus.

Isaiah 53 is one of the most amazing chapters in the whole Bible. Seven centuries in advance he wrote about the Savior and everything he would have to suffer to save us from sin, death, and Hell forever. If you ever want to know what the word "love" actually means, read this chapter. Jesus Is the Perfect Sacrifice in keeping with God's will at great cost but with future rewards.

One big question that we need to ask is this: why did Jesus die? At first that seems like there should be a simple answer. In a way, there is, as we will see, but it is also very complicated. One thing is clear: he didn't deserve to die. He is true God. He has always lived in perfect harmony with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Throughout his earthly life he never did anything wrong and always did what was right.

So why did he? It's easy to point an accusing finger at some people. One of his own disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed him and handed him over to his enemies. The Jewish religious leaders, the ones who should have been the first to recognize who he was instead hardened their hearts against him and plotted to kill him. The Roman government gave very little protection to people who were not Roman citizens. Certainly they are the ones who are most directly guilty of killing Jesus.

I remember years ago one of my cousins burst out crying at the end of the Good Friday service. Through her tears she said, "I'm so sorry that Jesus had to die for my sins." Ladies and gentlemen, that is contrition. That is genuine sorrow over sin. The Apostle Peter was looking at every one of us when he said, "**You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you. <sup>15</sup>You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead.**" We are responsible for his death.

That's the Law's answer to the question: why did Jesus die? Here's the Gospel's answer to that question, "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**" God loved the world, despite how utterly unlovable we had become. God saw us hopeless and helpless and his heart went out to us. Jesus died because that was the only way that God could really show his love to the world.

The Prophet Isaiah has a shocking answer to that question, "**Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and to allow him to suffer.**" If you remember this passage from the King James Version, it says that it pleased the LORD to do this. That's another way that you could translate that verb. It doesn't mean that God the Father got a kick out of sacrificing his one and only Son.

The point of that verb is to show that God did this simply because he is a loving God who wanted to win forgiveness and eternal life for the whole world. He was under absolutely no obligation to do anything for us. Yet, of his own free will, God decided that he was going to save humanity. His Law still needed to be kept. So Jesus came here and kept the Law perfectly. Because everyone who sins stands under God's curse, Jesus became a curse for us so that we could have his own righteousness.

This is the kind of thing that the Apostle Paul was talking about when he wrote to the Ephesians, "**I pray that you would be able to comprehend, along with all the saints, how wide and long and high and deep his love is, <sup>19</sup>and that you would be able to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.**"

This text defines the name "the LORD" for us. He is the God of undeserved love. He is the God who makes promises and keeps those promises no matter what. He is the God we can completely and utterly rely on.

If he was willing to do all of this for people before any of us knew him or cared about him, just imagine what he can and will do for us now that we are his blood-bought children.

Jesus Is the Perfect Sacrifice in keeping with God's will but at great cost.

In Old Testament times there were five different kinds of sacrifices that the people would offer. All of them pointed ahead to Jesus and the work that he would do on behalf of the people. The first is the burnt offering. As the name implies, the whole animal was burned up on the altar. It was offered whenever the community or an individual sinned. Symbolically, it would win forgiveness for that sin.

The next is the grain offering. People usually offered those at the harvest. It was a way to say thank you to God for providing for them for another year. Third is the peace offering. I've sometimes semi-seriously referred to this as the potluck offering because that's essentially what it was. The animal was sacrificed, but then it would be eaten by that family or a group of families along with the priests as a way to show their fellowship with each other and with their God.

One of the most well-known sacrifices is the sin sacrifice. Maybe a better term for it would be the purification offering. If people had done something to make them ceremonially unclean, that sacrifice would make them clean in God's sight and enable them to rejoin society. The last one is the one that Isaiah specifically mentions here: the guilt offering, or maybe better, the restitution offering.

For example if someone accidentally killed their neighbor's animal, he would give him a suitable replacement plus 20% of its value given to the priests. As I said, Jesus is in all five sacrifices. Here Isaiah is showing how Jesus' sacrifice paid God back for the damage humanity had done to his perfect creation and to his reputation as God through our sin. God isn't holding anything over our heads anymore. Our debt to him is paid in full.

Sometimes I think people get the idea that because Jesus is true God, the pain of the cross really didn't hurt him that much. Everything in the Scriptures says the exact opposite. Look at that powerful words that Isaiah uses in this text to describe what Jesus endured: **"crush him...suffer...anguish...carried their guilt...poured out his life to death...carried the sin of many."**

If you ever want to know just how serious God is about sin, listen to our sinless Savior on the cross. Hear him cry out in agony, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** At the beginning and the end of the crucifixion he called God his Father. Now that perfect love and harmony that he enjoyed with his Father was nowhere to be found. God the Father utterly and completely rejected God the Son because he didn't want to reject us. Only the blood of the innocent Lamb of God would be sufficient.

Isaiah writes, **"he let himself be counted with rebellious sinners."** We learn a couple of things here. The Son of God who is perfect and innocent was considered to be another human being who had rebelled against God. As a matter of fact, God considered him to be every rebel, every sinner, every idolater, every murderer, every thief, all rolled up into one. Consider that an eternity in Hell is not too long for one person to pay for his sins. Yet in a few short hours on the cross, Jesus suffered everyone's eternity in Hell.

But there's something even more amazing here. Isaiah said that Jesus **"let himself be counted with rebellious sinners."** He was not unwilling. He was not dragged kicking and screaming to the cross. Luke tells us, **"When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem."** If you ever think no one loves you, if you ever think no one cares, Jesus does and he proved it.

Jesus Is the Perfect Sacrifice at great cost but with future rewards.

Did you ever think that it is weird that we call Good Friday good? Doesn't seem to be much good about it. Everything is dark. The altar, pulpit, and lectern are draped in black. We sing a bunch of hymns in a minor key. The Son of God lies dead in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. But that day shouldn't just make us break in to tears, like what happened with my cousin. Isaiah gives us plenty of good reasons why.

He writes, **"Because you made his life a guilt offering, he will see offspring."** Wait a minute. Jesus never got married or had children. But earlier in this book Isaiah quotes him as saying, **"Here I am and the children God has given me."** Who are these children? I'm looking at them right now. It includes all those who have been brought to know and believe in him. This is what Jesus wanted. This is why he died.

Isaiah also says, **"He will prolong his days...<sup>12</sup>Therefore I will give him an allotment among the great, and with the strong he will share plunder, because he poured out his life to death."** This is certainly true. Obviously Jesus is great in our eyes because we recognize that he is the Savior. As long as this world goes on, the message of what Jesus has done for us will continue to be proclaimed. God promised.

But his name is even great for people who don't believe in him as the Savior. Even non-Christians know about him. The vast majority of people celebrate Christmas, even if they won't darken the doors of a church.

Muslims consider him to at least be a prophet. From the fact that so many people work so hard to try to discredit the reality of the Jesus of the Bible is proof of just how great and important he is.

Isaiah shows more results of Jesus' sacrifice, "**the LORD's gracious plan will succeed in his hand...He will provide satisfaction. Through their knowledge of him, my just servant will justify the many...He himself carried the sin of many.**" In English we use the word "many" to mean "not all." Both Greek and Hebrew tend to use it in the sense of "not a few." Passages like John 3:16 show that God loves the whole world. Isaiah just wants to emphasize that this didn't happen for a few, but for a huge, uncountable number.

Jesus provided satisfaction. He offered the perfect sacrifice for sin and God the Father accepted it. He justified us. Think of a courtroom scene. We are on trial. God is our judge. We are accused of sin. But instead Jesus stands up and takes the blame for us. We go free. Jesus goes to the cross. So God declares us to be not guilty of any sin because they've all been taken away by his sinless Son.

In the closing words of this text Isaiah tells us about one thing that Jesus is still doing for us before our heavenly Father's throne, "**he intercedes for the rebels.**" Even though Jesus died for us, we don't cease to be rebels. All of us sin each and every day. Satan wants to live up to his name. That name means "accuser." He wants to accuse us of sin before God's throne and demand punishment for us.

There Jesus is like our defense attorney. All he has to do is show the nail marks in his hands, and that accusation is thrown out of court too. He intercedes for us before our own consciences. When our hearts condemn us, remember those nail marks are for you too. When people in this world want to get after us for trying to live like Christian, Jesus is right there. He says, "**Well done, good and faithful servant!**" The world will never appreciate us. Jesus always does.

Jesus Is the Perfect Sacrifice in keeping with God's will at great cost but with future rewards. Sometimes people wonder, "How much did Old Testament believers know about their Savior?" Based on the sacrifices and on this chapter, we have to say they knew quite a bit. Their Savior is our Savior. He is the Savior for generations yet to be born.