

## The Suffering Savior and Us

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One of the most compelling prophecies concerning the Messiah is contained in Isaiah chapters forty to fifty-five. The prophecy bursts with praise at the realization of God's redemption of His people (Isa. 52). The watchmen of Israel sing with joy at the news of God's reign over the world. The comforting news of God's salvation was to be published to the ends of the earth.

Then, in the next chapter, Isaiah's prophecy takes a sudden dark turn. Isaiah describes the surprising nature of the Messiah's revelation to the world. The Messiah was not what the people expected. The watchmen of Israel proclaim the good news of God's Messiah, but no one believes their report (Isa. 53:1). Instead, the Messiah is rejected by the people that He came to save. Notice how the Messiah's suffering is described in Isaiah chapter fifty-three.

Unimpressive pedigree and embarrassing appearance

Despised and rejected

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief

Bore our grief and carried our sorrow

Stricken, smitten and afflicted

Pierced, crushed and chastised

Oppressed, stricken and discarded

The suffering of our Savior culminated at His cross. Peter would later explain how Jesus was "crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). Crucifixion was intended to cause the greatest of agony to the condemned. After being beaten half to death, Jesus was nailed to a cross. Suspended between Heaven and earth, He struggled to breathe. Water slowly filled his lungs and around His heart until life left His mangled body. To ensure He had died, a Roman soldier stabbed His torso. Water and blood spurt out of His side: evidence of asphyxiation.

The suffering of Jesus was the reason many rejected Him as the Messiah. The Messiah was supposed to be the leader in a successful revolution against the Roman Empire. To most, Jesus represented another failed attempt at liberation. Yet, suffering is exactly how God made Jesus king.

In God's immeasurable wisdom, He used self-giving love by the suffering of Jesus to redeem His people. Self-giving love was then as it is now: unexpected. Trying to prepare the apostles for His death, Jesus once described how His power would be used differently compared to worldly power: "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over

them, and their great ones exercise authority over them... For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42, 45).

The suffering of the Messiah proved His love for us. Love to such a degree is compelling. The love of the Messiah proven by suffering is what draws us to Him. Paul once wrote, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

### **What's the Point?**

**1. The Messiah calls us to suffer.** After telling the apostles of His death for the first time, Jesus said, "...If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).

**2. Enduring hostility.** Like the Messiah, we must be willing to endure ridicule and even physical violence. Many Christians have suffered in the past. Many Christians suffer presently for the name of Jesus. Thankfully, we are blessed to live quiet and peaceful lives in the service of Jesus. We enjoy the freedom to worship openly without threat. We can teach the Gospel. In light of this, we may wonder how we are to share in the suffering of the Messiah.

**3. Prayers of empathy.** In Romans chapter eight, Paul wrote, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:22-27).

Like the Messiah, we are to empathize with the suffering of the world. This requires an awareness of the plight of others. We cannot comfort the grieving without first being acquainted with their grief. We must put the needs of others before our own needs. Empathy will cause our knees to bend and our heads to bow in prayer for the suffering. Self-giving love will compel us to help those who are hurting. We are to be the points at which the suffering of the world is met with the care of God. God relieves suffering by the Spirit through His people.

### **Conclusion**

As humans, we are all too often focused on pride, winning, and power. We strive for accomplishment. With the victor goes the spoils. Like the apostles desired, we want to be great in the eyes of our peers. Such misconceptions about life will cause us to reject the suffering Messiah.

Jesus was everything Isaiah had prophesied about the Messiah. Jesus suffered for our salvation. If we are truly the people of the suffering Messiah, we must learn to suffer for the sake of our salvation. We must learn self-giving love. We must learn empathy. We must use our sorrow to radiate the love of God into the dark and dying world.