

# THE SUFFERING SERVANT

DEVOTIONAL READING: Philippians 2:1-11

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Luke 24:1-35

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 53:4-11a

## I. The Servant's Death

### Isaiah 53:4-9

**4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.**

**5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; 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 hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

**7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.**

**8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.**

**9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.**

4. In keeping with how suffering was often viewed in biblical times, those who witnessed the servant's suffering saw it

as a punishment from *God*. The servant was deemed to be bearing the *griefs* and *sorrows* associated with his own sinful actions. No one would assume that he was suffering on account of the wrongdoings of others.

Followers of Jesus can readily see these words as a compelling description of Jesus' suffering on the cross. Those who mocked Him there voiced their belief that God had abandoned Him—that He was *stricken*, *smitten*, and *afflicted* (Matthew 27:43-44). There was a sense in which the servant was stricken by God, in that Jesus fulfilled God's "determinate counsel and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). But why He suffered matters tremendously.

Jesus' death was the ultimate example of substitutionary atonement. In the Law of Moses, atonement for sins was fulfilled through God's accepting the sacrifice of animals. They were substitutes for the people who had sinned and so deserved to die. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for others' sins. For this reason, we no longer offer sacrifices of grain or oil or animals; Jesus is the last and perfect sacrifice.

We must keep in mind that Jesus' death impacts every aspect of our humanity, both spiritual and physical. Jesus died so that a complete reversal of the curse of sin could be accomplished. The wholeness of

body accomplished by Jesus' servanthood is illustrated in Matthew 8:14-17. Immediately following a description of Jesus' healing ministry and His power to cast out unclean spirits, Matthew wrote that all this happened "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet" (Matthew 8:17).

During Jesus' earthly ministry, miracles and signs demonstrated that He possessed power to heal all brokenness, sinful or otherwise. His return will usher in new heavens and a new earth from which sin and its consequences will be banished (Revelation 21:1-4). Until that day, Jesus takes our infirmities and sicknesses, not by healing them immediately in every instance but by providing grace in those circumstances. His grace empowers us and enhances our testimony to others.

5. The emphasis on how the servant suffered for humanity continues. We are guilty, but Jesus was treated as though *He* were. *Chastisement* signals the consequence for sin, the consequence *we* deserved. *Peace* with God is the result (Romans 5:1); indeed Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14-17).

6. Here human beings are compared to *sheep*, which are known for easily wandering *astray* into what is harmful to them. While we were all born inclined to sin (Psalm 51:5), we also choose sin (Romans 6:1-2). Humanity's descent into sin is not something we have no part in; we make choices to turn from God. Yet the one against whom we sin, whose law and standards we treat with contempt, placed our wrongdoings and their punishment on the servant. *All* is repeated to emphasize that every one of us has sinned, and the servant has given His life for each of us.

If we are sheep, who will shepherd us? Note that Jesus declared himself as our shepherd (John 10:1-18; 1 Peter 2:25).

Like a shepherd, Jesus takes responsibility for our lives. If we are enticed by sin and so die, Jesus the shepherd takes the loss to heart and grieves over the consequences of our sinfully misguided actions.

7a. The servant would respond to his cruel treatment with silence. When we ponder who Jesus was and the power in His spoken word, such silence should produce a reverent silence within us. Jesus used His words to heal the sick, raise the dead, calm storms, and work other miracles. Yet when it came to defending himself, He said nothing (Matthew 26:63a; 27:12-14).

Jesus did not remain silent when others were being harmed. He called out the enemies who would kill Him for the ways their hypocrisy damaged the people of Israel (Matthew 23:13-36). His speech on behalf of others contributed to the hatred those powerful leaders felt for Jesus (26:3-5). Yet He did not argue on His own behalf to proclaim His innocence.

7b. *Sheep* imagery links this concept to Isaiah 53:6. The comparison to *a lamb* being led *to the slaughter* emphasizes humility and (apparent) powerlessness. A lamb could not overpower the priest who would slaughter it for a sacrifice.

Such language did not become triumphal until the early believers began to understand Jesus as the Lamb of God. In that role, He fulfilled His Father's plan to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 1:29). This same sacrificial Lamb is worshipped in Heaven and by every creature that exists: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Revelation 5:13).

8a. This verse prophesied the travesty of a trial that Jesus experienced at the hands of His enemies. In their bit-

ter hatred of Jesus, they denied Him any semblance of a fair proceeding. The witnesses called to testify against Jesus did not agree in their testimony (Mark 14:55-59), but He was still found guilty and crucified.

8b. This seems to be an indictment against Jesus' fellow Jews. They not only failed to protest His condemnation, they demanded it (Luke 23:21).

8c. Jesus' life was *cut off out of the land of the living* at about age 33. Even so, the injustice that He, the servant, experienced and the shameful circumstances surrounding His execution fulfilled a high and holy purpose. Yes, He was *stricken*, but only so that His death could serve as a substitutionary atonement for us (Isaiah 53:5).

9. Jesus fulfilled this passage in two ways. First, Jesus was an innocent man who was convicted as if He were a notorious criminal; when a crowd was offered a choice between releasing Him or a man guilty of murder and insurrection, it chose the latter (Mark 15:6-15). As a result, Jesus was hung between two criminals as if He were one of them. Jesus had engaged in violence to clear the temple (John 2:14), but He never committed a violent act that would call for crucifixion.

Second, Jesus was buried in the grave of a rich man. Normally criminals at the time of Jesus who were executed were left unburied. Eventually, the beasts and the birds consumed their flesh. Jesus, however, was treated differently as two factors came together: a request by Jewish leaders to get the bodies off the crosses, which was followed by Jesus' interment in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man (Matthew 27:57; John 19:31-42).

## II. The Servant's Delight

### Isaiah 53:10-11a

#### 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise

him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11a He shall see of the travail of his soul.

10a. *The Lord* was at work in and through the servant's suffering, though not in the sense that God was punishing the servant for his own sins (Isaiah 53:4). In truth, the servant's suffering and death constituted *an offering for sin*.

What made this offering distinct from others was the connection between the sin committed and the remedy stipulated in the law. Jesus' atoning death on the cross was exactly what humanity needed. And it was a sacrifice that needed to be offered only once. By Jesus' death He destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

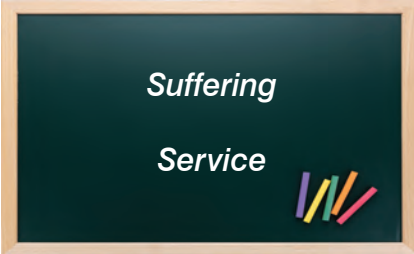
10b. The number of Jesus' disciples—*his seed*—has continued to grow since the first century AD, when His church was established. That the servant *shall prolong his days* likely points to Jesus' resurrection. That was by no means obvious to any Jewish interpreter before Jesus had actually been raised from the dead. Only then did His disciples begin to grasp how He fulfilled many prophecies, including this one.

11a. Jesus was able to look at the *travail*, or suffering, He went through and know that He did indeed accomplish the work given to him. Hebrews 12:2 says that "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Just as we cannot begin to understand the depth of Jesus' suffering, we cannot imagine the joy that He felt after He uttered the words "It is finished" (John 19:30).

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT

### Into the Lesson



Take one minute to write a sentence that includes these two words.

---

---

---

In what contexts, if any, does service always include suffering?

---

---

---

What are some notable examples of service that include suffering?

---

---

---

Today's lesson includes some of the most beautiful and oft-quoted passages in Scripture.

But these also describe a harsh reality of a certain suffering.

### Into the Word

Read Isaiah 53:4-11a and make a bullet-point list of what Isaiah said about the servant.

---

---

---

---

---

List specific actions of Jesus that fulfilled the prophecy.

---

---

---

---

---

### Into Life

Create a third list regarding what the servant's suffering did for you.

---

---

---

Write one sentence of thanksgiving or praise to God for something specific the Suffering Servant has done for you.

---

---

---

### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Jesus makes both the prophecies of Scripture and our lives complete.