

Isaiah 53:7-12 (NKJV) Dec 30

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

9 And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You 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.

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

“God's power is at its greatest, not in his destruction of the wicked, but in his taking all the wickedness of the earth into himself and giving back love. J N Oswalt”

If we are to understand God we must understand a few things about Him. And the one that is most surprising to me (and I am probably not alone) is that God truly **takes pleasure** in loving His children. He **takes pleasure** in winning people to Himself. And it is not the same kind of **pleasure** that arises from **our** natural state.

Suppose you were God. And you were looking at this person who is now you. And you were making a decision about whether you would want to send your Son to die a horrible death to save this person. Then think about your history even **since** coming to Christ. Think about the many times you have done what you wanted to do with **no concern at all** about what God wanted. Think about the times you knowingly sinned because you wanted the deceitful pleasure of sin, even though **you knew** it was deceitful. **You knew** you were being lied to. Think about the fact that we cannot go 24 hours without sinning, without failing to love God as God deserves to be loved.

Now this is the kind of knowledge **God had** about us. God was not idealistic like we might have been. He knew **exactly** what He was getting. Again, imagine being

God. Imagine what it would take for you to say, "I know what he is. I know what she is. I know they will fail me miserably. I know they will rebel against me from time to time. I know they will slander my name by the way that they live, even **after** they are mine. I know all this. But I still want to save them. I still want to shed my beloved Son's blood for them."

Since God is omniscient, there is no way to see this any other way. That is **exactly** the decision that God made. And that is **exactly** the decision that Christ made as well. He fully endorsed what His Father wanted done. He was **equally committed** to carrying this thing out. We ask a lot of "why" questions to God. Why must I suffer? Why can't I have what others have? Why am I so lonely? We have lots of "why" questions. But there is even a better why question. Based on what God knows, **why** did He choose to love **me**? Why did He single **me** out and call me to Himself? Why did He die **for me**? Maybe that is the why question we should fixate on. Maybe that should be our **go-to** why question. "God, why do you love me?" And no matter how we cut it, we can only come to one conclusion. God loves us because **God is loving**. It is **like God** to love the children He wants for Himself. It is not that we are lovely. From a morality basis, God picks only ugly brides. There is no beauty in us that causes Him to lose control of His mind, like we often refer to love. We have no natural appeal, no redeeming qualities to earn His love. That is hard on our pride, but it is true. Christ takes pleasure in choosing a people for Himself and gradually, over time, conforming them to His image. God likes showing off His grace.

That is the underpinning of our whole text. That is the thing driving the whole prophecy. God had a plan to win His people back to Himself. And like we learned two weeks ago, it was **prudent**. It was perfectly designed to be effective.

As we go over our text this week, keep this in mind. This plan that the prophet reveals hundreds of years before it happened was designed to save you, if you have called out to Christ in faith to save you. This suffering servant was sent to **save your soul**, even with your ugly track record and your intermittent faithful responses to God's love and call. We share this together. We are the fellowship of the **unfitting**, but **loved**, people.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

Do you ever have doubts about whether your faith is really true? Do you ever wonder if you only believe it because it is what you grew up with? Let Isaiah 53

minister to you. Look at the pre-picture of Christ in Isaiah. Look at what it said Christ would be like. Then look at Luke's record of Christ.

Luke 23:8-11 (NKJV)

⁸ Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long *time* to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him.

⁹ Then he questioned Him with many words, but Christ answered him nothing.

¹⁰ And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him.

¹¹ Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate.

Christ was oppressed and afflicted but didn't open His mouth. When we read all the gospel accounts many things become clear. One of them is that Christ never made the least attempt to escape what was coming. Had He wanted to, he may have been able to do so even without exhibiting any spiritual power. He may have been able to simply talk His way out of it. But Christ never had any intention of **getting out of** the mission that God had Him come to the planet for. The Isaiah passage makes this extremely clear. Christ was not going to respond with the normal responses you would think a human would have. **We** try to escape pain. **We** try to prove innocence. **We** try to get justice when we are badly treated. **We** want our name cleared. Christ did nothing like what you would expect. It is like there was **nothing of flesh** to appeal to. In fact, there wasn't. Jesus had no sin nature. If you want to know what perfect compliance to the will of God looks like, look at Christ.

Notice the language of **lamb-hood**. This was not a coincidence. This was designed to draw attention to the nature of what Christ was doing. He was the sacrificial lamb of God. Except the lambs to be slaughtered never **had a say** in the process. Christ did. Everything about this display shows His willingness to comply. There is zero resistance. This passage is meant to display Christ's willingness. He didn't fight back. He didn't claim rights. He had given all of them up before He left His Father's right hand. Things were progressing as planned.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

Here again we have a perfectly fulfilled prophesy about how Christ would die. But contained in the prophesy is also why Christ **had to die**. There was nothing **surprising** to God about this and there was nothing that was **not surprising** to man.

Christ was taken from prison and from judgment. We know that Christ was being held by the legal authorities. As I studied this I came across several sources that use the context to understand this verse better. We have the words “taken, cut off, and stricken”. Hebrew authors seem to say these are all speaking of Christ’s death. Onlookers would have thought that the authorities **were progressing** to kill Christ. They were putting a process in place that would kill Christ. And so they were attempting to do. So they don’t get off the hook. But we see that God was doing something else. He was cutting short the time that these evil people had their way with Christ. Because **they** were killing Christ because **they hated Christ**. **God** was killing Christ because **He loves us and hates sin**. So it was God who cut Christ from the land of the living. It was God who struck Christ for the transgression of My people. It was God who took Christ from the government’s prison and judgment.

Again and again we see this. Our eyes cannot always discern spiritual reality. Life can **look** one way, but it can be completely different **in reality**. That is how it was here. It **looked like** the ruling authorities were in control. It **looked like** evil was winning. It **looked like** Christ was powerless against their attempts to destroy Him. And all of that is exactly backwards. God is in complete control, wresting Christ from the means the rulers set in motion and God completed His own agenda.

Now who will declare His generation? I didn’t find anything that gave me any help with this. It looks to me like this is saying, who knows this inner scoop? Who is going to tell people who are watching not **how it appears** but **how it truly is**? And the answer **at first** will be, very few. But soon there will be thousands who will be telling the truth about this event. And it will be wonderful.

Now I want you to notice something very important in this verse. For whose transgressions was Christ stricken? Was it for the sin of **everyone**? This would have been a very good place to say it if this was true. But no. It says **For the transgressions of My people**.

The reformers called this principle “limited atonement”. They say that Christ did not die for the sins of everyone who breathes. He only died for those that He would call to Himself. This means we need to be careful **what we tell people**. We **can and should** tell every human being that if they will call upon Christ in faith to save them, He will do so. We can **say that** because Christ promises **to do so**. But we cannot say to a person that Christ died for their sins. Because we really don’t know. We do know that Christ died for the sins **of everyone who would come to Him**. We can declare that powerfully and truthfully.

There is also something else to consider. If Christ died for the sins of everyone, somehow His sacrifice was **ineffective** for the majority of those He died for. When you think about that, it is easy to see that this doesn't make much sense. Christ does nothing ineffectively. He does all things well. His plan is prudent and effective. Christ died and His death is **perfectly effective** in removing the guilt for all the transgressions of God's people, of anyone who would ever call upon Him. And to add to that, that is **why** Christ died. That is what this project was aimed at and it was perfectly effective. From beginning to end, it was about taking away the penalty of sin for those who would come to Him and it was about giving them new spiritual life who were formally dead.

9 And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

People mock the Bible all day long, as if there is really no proof that it is true. But really, what are the chances that someone would fulfill this prophesy? This required a rich man to risk his life in order to bury a dead man. What is the chance of this happening? And the guy who did it was not part of an inner circle. He certainly was not part of a conspiracy. Who is going to do this? But we see who did it.

Luke 23:50-56 (NKJV)

⁵⁰ **Now behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man.**

⁵¹ **He had not consented to their decision and deed. *He was* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God.**

⁵² **This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.**

⁵³ **Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before.**

Normally if Christ had been a criminal one would expect Him to have a criminal's burial. It would be sparse. But look at what happened. Jesus, **who had no home** to call His own, got a grade A tomb to lie in for a few days. Why? Because Christ was not a criminal.

Notice how this is worded. He had done no violence. He had no deceit in His mouth. Basically Jesus had **done nothing wrong** and He had **said nothing wrong**. Yep. That is pretty much perfect. As such, He deserved honor in His death, not dishonor. It is odd that God did not provide Christ with much worldly honor in **His life**. But He saw that He was honored **in His death**.

If you feel like sometimes God doesn't quickly come to your defense, showing everyone the truth about your situation, you have very good company in Christ.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You 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.

Here again we see what it was all about. It was going to be completely and absolutely successful. The “yet” is placed here in contrast to the meaningless suffering that appeared to be inflicted by the human beings around Christ. There is an eternal “yet” just pregnant with purpose.

We can't miss this for our own encouragement. Sometimes it looks like we are suffering meaninglessly. Sometimes we can't figure it out. The more Christlike we become, the worse we get treated. The more we win over temptation, the worse our life becomes. We want to shout, this is not how it is supposed to work. But sometimes it does. And why? Because God is arbitrary and capricious? No. He has a **greater purpose**. And we simply can't see it **yet**. Think about it. If this is what happened to God's Son, is it not likely to happen to us? Do we really deserve better than what Christ suffered?

So we see the **meaning** in Christ's sufferings comes in the realization that **He was substituted for us**. Now we cannot think that God took pleasure in punishing an innocent person, in fact the **only** innocent person. That is not what we are to get from this passage. What we are to get is that God took pleasure in carrying out His plan to win people to Himself in the only way that **they could** be won. He was pleased to provide a way to have people with Him for eternity. Why? I really don't get that. It makes no sense to me. Our sin is nauseating to God. But He is pleased in carrying out a way so people like us can hang out with God forever. We are nothing like God. God's love is only **caught** by us. We sure don't get any credit for creating any of it. We only love Him because He loved us first. We only truly love **anyone** because He loved us first.

Now what is the end game? What made it worth Christ's while to do what He did?

When You 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.

There you have it. All those prodigal sons returning home. That is the payoff to Christ. Like the Father in the Prodigal son story, Christ longs to run to us and embrace us and welcome us to Himself and His family. Great is the rejoicing over one person coming to Him. It is **like God** to love us.

Christ wants to see His seed. Christ wants the numberless throng in heaven there to worship Him. Carla and I were talking about how long the lines might be in Heaven to get to talk to Christ. But lines aren't a problem in eternity. We have

time to wait. And if there is such a line, think of all the wonderful stories we will get to hear of the grace of God. I never looked forward to waiting in a line so much.

This is good to understand. Christ did not suffer because He enjoys suffering. Christ suffered because He wants us with Him. The price He paid was worth it to Him to have our company with Him, praising Him as our **Savior** and **Lord** and **heavenly hero** forever. Everyone who is there will know that He is the only reason they are there.

Look, we are pretty stupid. We can come up with a hundred scenarios for feeling unloved and for pitying ourselves. Really, aren't we good at that? But how in the world can we pity ourselves when Christ died to spend time with us, or more accurate, for us to have a chance to spend eternity with Him. And **what** are you pitying yourself about? What petty thing are you over focused on today instead of this?

Christ **did what He did to get what He will get**. And that is what He expects from us. We are to **live** faithfully serving Him **to get** the reward of our labors. And He promises that the reward will always be worthwhile.

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

Again, we do not know why this reward is **worth it** for Christ. We only know that it is. What is the labor of Christ's soul? It is our salvation. And when He sees that He will be bummed out because **what He gets isn't exactly as good as He expected?** No. Nothing of the kind. He will be satisfied. It really is worth it. Again how? How can He compute it that way. This is **us** we are talking about getting? Really. Couldn't He do better? But oh, this is so much like Christ. Christ is **satisfied** in getting **us** after trading His life for us.

Fill your mind with this. Let this be absorbed in every corner of your heart. This is how your Savior loves you. If you want to be loved, don't start with another human who will just let you down. Start here. Anchor here. Christ's love will never let you down. He loved you enough to die for you. And He **knows** you. Start there. Look **there** to be loved. And then move out from there. Don't start with a human. They simply cannot ever love you like Christ already has. Start with Christ.

And so how are we justified? How are we made just as if I never sinned? How can that happen to a sinful human? By a perfect sacrificial lamb of God being sacrificed for our sins. That is how. Christ bore our iniquities. He took them upon Himself as if He had done every one of them. And when we **know this** and when

we **accept this**, when we call out to God trusting that **what He said He meant**, when we call out to God trusting that what Christ did **will save us too** if we will only believe, then we too will be justified.

It is by faith in Christ we are saved.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,***

⁹ **not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

¹⁰ **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

Here was the mission of the Jewish Messiah. He was not coming to set up an earthly kingdom just yet. He was coming to deal with the most desperate need of humans. We need to be forgiven of our sin. We need free of our guilt and shame. We need to be OK. And Christ did just that for His children. And what will be the result?

12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

Here is success at its very finest. This is what the Father will do with Christ's success. And who gets the benefit? You and I of course? Is it because of anything we have done? Of course not. It is only because of what Christ has done.

We get a share of the spoil. **We** get a benefit from the reward **Christ has earned**. Are we surprised? We shouldn't be. That is just like Christ to share all good things with His beloved.

Now look at just what Christ did to earn this rich reward.

He poured out His soul unto death.

He was numbered with the transgressors.

He bore the sins of many.

He made intercession for the transgressors.

Christ looked at us and this is what He did.

He gave up His life for us. Us. The **real** us, not the Sunday us. This was the Thursday night us He died for.

He was **counted** as a sinner because He took our sin. He was **not** a sinner. But He was willing to **be regarded as one** for our behalf.

He bore our sins. He owned them. He experienced them. Those memories of sin we cringe about and are ashamed of, He felt all that. He became guilty of those things **He most hates and would never do Himself**, and it happened because of us.

And He prayed for us. He interceded for us. He represented God for us when we had no way of approaching God.

This is the salvation message. We are not good. But Christ, the only good human being, God in the flesh, took upon Himself our sins and died for us, in our place. And now we can call upon Him, trusting His completed work to save us from our sins and to give us the power to live a new life.

Wow.

This was the Messiah that the world needed, no matter what the world thought it needed, no matter what the world wanted.

Notice too, that none of this was stated as **just happening** to Christ. It was all a **choice**. It was all something He was doing for those He loved. It is bordering on the unimaginable.

Everything that we as believers are commanded to do comes back to this base. Everything comes back to what Christ did for us. Can we not love our brothers? Look what Christ did, and He is far better than us. Can we not face hardship? Look what Christ did. And He is far better than us. Can we not face being misunderstood and maligned? Look at what Christ did. And He is far better than us. Can we not handle treatment that is less than what we think we deserve? Well look what Christ did. And He is far better than us.

The call to the Christian life is never to do more than what Christ has already done. The appeal to us is only ever to **be more like Christ**. We are called to do things that are more like Christ. We **will never** and **can never** exceed the price that He paid willingly and knowingly to save us.

Let us simply fill our minds this week with the reality of God's love for us. And let us allow that to inspire us to destroy all the excuses we have for not totally surrendering ourselves to this glorious love of God.