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Stricken, Smitten by God and Afflicted

Isaiah 53:4-5

Prayer: *Father, we do again, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for, again, the gift of the gospel, the gift of your Son, and again we are back into the book of Isaiah and we are back looking into your servant songs and so once again, Lord, we want to pray as we open up the book and look deeper into the heart of your Son and what it is he's done for us at the cross, that you would continue to give us the grace, the strength, and the wisdom we need, give us the presence of your Holy Spirit so that we might learn anew and in an even deeper way what it is you've done for us. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have been looking at the servant songs of Isaiah as you know and actually for the last few weeks, the spotlight has kind of been outward on us. Last time we looked at verse 3 of *Isaiah 53:3* which says this, it says: *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.* Last time out we looked at what it means to hide our faces from Christ

physically, mentally, and spiritually. This morning I want to turn the spotlight inward on Christ, and the reason why is actually very simple and I've shared this with you many times, I want us all to fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus Christ. And the way you fall deeper in love with Jesus is by learning exactly who he is, what he did, and what it cost him to love us.

You know, there's a popular saying and there's even a song that goes with it that says, "Life is hard, but God is good." And it takes absolutely no effort whatsoever to get folks to believe the first part of that statement because most of us already agree that life, well, it's hard. The difficult part for some is that second part: "But God is good." I sit down with folks all the time and I hear horror story on horror story about how hard life is for some. And sometimes I confess, I'm just baffled by it all and all I can do is just sit there like Job's friends did, just to sit in silence and to acknowledge somebody else's pain. Folks in those kind of situations are not usually looking for a vigorous defense of God's goodness, and I try to have the good sense not to offer one. But when someone sincerely wants to know how they can believe in a good God in the middle of a hard life, there is no better place to point them than to the cross, and that's where we're going this morning. And we're going there not to dwell on the morbid details of an innocent man's execution but instead to focus on what Jesus

voluntarily did for us on the cross, why it was beyond human comprehension, and how we can appropriate that sacrifice for ourselves. What, why, and how.

1 John 4:19 says: *We love because he first loved us.* You see, the more we know the height, the depths, the length and the breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, the more we will find it easier to say, "Life is hard, but God is good." And so first the "what." And our text this morning deals with just that, it's verse 4 of Isaiah 53 and 5. It says this, it says: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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.*

Well, the first thing that our text tells us this morning is that Jesus' suffering was vicarious, that is Jesus substituted himself for us, taking our place on the cross. The griefs and the sorrows that he was bearing belonged to us and not to him. *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.* In the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:24, Peter says: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

Now, the notion "our sins, his penalty," that's got a highly technical name; it's called penal substitution. And what it means is this, it means that Jesus went to the cross for the express purpose of substituting himself as the bearer of the penalty that belonged to us. You see, it was his goal to absorb every last bit of the divine judgment against sin that God has against you and me. And when it comes to the "what" of the cross, well we find out that there's a lot of controversy. There are at least three different competing views of what actually took place there. Now there's one camp that says that Jesus went to the cross to pay a ransom price to the devil and to hell himself in order to free us from captivity. We reject that notion out of hand because it posits a God as having to answer to someone or something that is either his equal or his superior. God answers to no one. God answers to no one other than himself, and he certainly owes no debt whatsoever to Satan and his fellow fallen angels except the debt of justice which is still owed and will be collected.

And there's another camp, there's another camp that says the whole purpose of Jesus going to the cross was for an outward and visible sign alone. God's only purpose in the cross was to demonstrate the love that God had for his people. For God so loved the world that he publicly demonstrated that love by sacrificing his only begotten

Son. I don't think that's love; I think that's psychosis. And it's only the third camp, the one that I am firmly in, that says the "what" of the cross is that Jesus was there to bear the wrath of God for our sins. In fact, the love camp is deeply offended by the wrath position. They see it as primitive and quite frankly as unGod-like to even imagine a God who is extracting a punishment for sin on anyone, let alone his only begotten Son. They point to the parable of the debtor who was forgiven a great debt by a man of great wealth only to go out and demand payment of a much lesser debt that was owed him as proof that Christ's substitutionary death was not even necessary. You see, if after all, in that story the debt is simply forgiven by a man of great wealth, then why can't God forgive all debts that way? Why this dreadful need to punish people? Why this dreadful need to punish his own Son? Well, it all comes down to a fifty cent word, and the word is called propitiation. This is the word that God uses to describe the "what" of the cross. And there are many people who find the word offensive. And they find it offensive because it has to do not only with paying a debt but also with the removal with the wrath associated with that debt. There are many theologians who find the idea of God's wrath primitive and repulsive. There are others who substitute a different fifty cent word for that; instead of "propitiation" they substitute the word "expiation." Now, expiation speaks of discharging of a moral debt, period. It

doesn't deal with the wrath associated with that debt. You see, the love camp in particular hates the notion that Jesus would go to the cross to pay for the wrath of sin from his own father. They say this notion that God would take out his wrath toward sin on his only begotten son is nothing more than a -- quote -- "twisted justification of violence," according to one author. And so despite the fact that there's two different fifty cent words here and it's easy to get lost in that, it is important to know the difference between these two words, propitiation and expiation, because the difference describes the "what" of the cross.

So let me explain these two words with an analogy. Let's say that in a moment of carelessness I go running through a stop sign and I hit you, and it's a real mess. I mean, your car is totaled, and you suffer some significant physical injuries that are going to require six months of rehab. Now, I know that the fault was totally mine, so I tell you I'm not going to fight this in court, I'm not going to do anything about it, just tell me what the costs are and I'll make it right to you. Well, the cost of repairing the car and my medical bills come to \$75,000. So I wrote you a check for \$80,000 to cover any further potential losses. At this point, I have expiated my wrong, I've expiated my debt. I've covered the loss, I paid the debt. However, I still have not dealt with the wrath part of the debt. See, there's a part of you that still says

in the back of your mind, well, it's not right that for six months I have to be in rehab while you get to go about your life. So I say to you after having given you the check, "By the way, I've taken a leave of absence from my job for the next six months, and for the next six months, I will be serving you. I will become your personal trainer. I'll pick you up and I'll take you to the gym and I'll work out with you until we get this right. I'll take you home, I'll cook your meals, I'll do anything that you would have been able to attend to until you are made right." Six months go by, and now you're perfectly restored, but you're not only restored, your wrath has been propitiated. You see, that little part inside of me that says it ain't right that I get to spend six months in rehab and he gets to walk around free, well, that's been replaced with "He made it right." See, the \$80,000 debt covered -- \$80,000 covered the debt and it produced expiation. My six months service to you absorbed your wrath and it produced propitiation.

People say, well, what does this have to do with the cross? Well, *1 John 2:2* says this: *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.* You see, it's a little known fact that much of the agony that Jesus experienced on the cross was his propitiation for our sins, his absorbing of God's wrath for us. That begs the question: Why is there wrath in the first place? I mean, why can't God just forgive

us our debts and be done with it? Well, the answer is because God is holy, and holiness demands a certain response to sin. Because we are made in God's image, we all react to gross sin with this sense of revulsion. We say, "That ain't right," or as my kids say, "That's messed up." The fact that we have this ability to even think in terms of "that ain't right." Well, that points to a fact that all of us have within us a moral compass, and everyone has within us an image, however faint, of what is God's holiness. You know, physicists like to talk about the background noise that the universe makes. There's also a moral background noise and it pervades the entire universe as well, and that background noise is God's holiness. Holiness is not only all that is good and right but it is also a revulsion of all that is bad and wrong, and God's holiness produces in him a revulsion towards sin and evil that we refer to as God's wrath, and that wrath pervades the entire universe. You see, everyone has within us a tiny little spark of that holiness, a sense of attraction to what is good and a revulsion towards what is evil, and we see that in our reaction to overwhelming evil.

You know, recently there was an awful incident that took place in the midwest. A man kidnapped a young girl, yanked her right out of her yard and into his car, and they found him two hours later. They also found the little girl that he had kidnapped and killed.

And what he had done was so hideous, it was so revolting that people were at a loss for words. And the entire community didn't know what to do with themselves. You know, they held vigils, they had prayer rallies and they did that because we all have this moral compass and this sin was so awful, it tilted the moral compass of the entire community. There is no propitiation, there is no removal of wrath that human beings can produce for sins this hideous. If this man spent the next 75 years in jail, the day he walked out, there would still be a cosmic wrath and revulsion at his sin and it will not go away. You see for him in this life, there's only expiation. There's a debt to be paid; a punishment to be meted out. And society demands it because the universe demands it, and it is only human beings who have this demand for expiation, and it's only because we are made in the image of God. You know, if a bear came out of the woods and attacked a herd of deer and it snatched up one of the young ones, they would quickly get over it and nobody would bat an eye. Well, not so with human beings who are made in the image of God. You see, an act as hideous as this tilts the moral universe for every single person who even hears of it. And because we all bear the image of God, we all share the same revulsion when confronted with such evil. And yet, you know, worldwide within the sex slavery industry, this is an every day occurrence. It's something that God sees repeated probably dozens of times every single day worldwide and he's seen it for thousands

of years. It's only one of the thousands of moral attacks on his holiness that he witnesses from us every second of every day. So try to imagine God's absolute transcendent holiness and his inherent revulsion of things evil and you'll begin to get a hint at the wrath of God that permeates our fallenness.

Now, God's holy wrath is expressed not only over the most hideous of sins but over all sin everywhere. God's holiness is confronted every single time any one of us falls short of his divine perfection for murder itself to the stealing, as I've said, of a paper clip. In short, the problem that we have with God is this ocean of wrath that needs to be propitiated. In *Romans 3:23*, it says this: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

You see, the "what" of the cross is propitiation. In *1 John 4:10* it says: *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* Now the "why" of the cross. The "why" of the cross is the answer to why Jesus' death on the cross was any different from any other hideous crucifixion that had taken place at that time. You know, Tim Keller and others have pointed out that if Jesus' crucifixion

was like that of thousands and thousands of other crucifixions that took place at that time, well then Jesus' reaction seems somewhat less than stoic. We look at the scripture, we remember how Jesus anticipated his crucifixion in *Matthew 26:36* it says this, it says: *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."* *Luke 22:44* says: *And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

Now there's no doubt that there were people in Jesus' day who faced crucifixion far more stoically than Jesus appears to have faced it. The scripture says he *began to be sorrowful and troubled*. He says, *"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death."* *His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* You see, there's only two ways to look at Jesus' reaction. Number one, we can conclude that Jesus was less than stoic as he faced his greatest fear, or we can conclude that what Jesus faced was something beyond human description. I'll go with the latter

because it gives new meaning to our text this morning which is *Isaiah 53:4*. It says: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

Now this word "stricken," the word "stricken" indicates a transition. It implies a suddenness, something happening with a rapidity that was never anticipated. You know, we get stricken with things like heart attacks and strokes which are by their very nature, they're sudden; they just happen quickly. Getting stricken even with cancer paints a picture of a sudden, terrifying change in your life regardless of what type of cancer it may be, and finding out about it is almost always sudden and dramatic. So being stricken is quick. Nobody gets stricken with old age. Nobody gets stricken with obesity. So Jesus was sorely troubled and he was sorely troubled about being stricken. He was just beginning to taste the outer edges of the wrath of God. And the trouble didn't start at the cross, it started days earlier with Jesus says in *John 12:27*: *"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."* You see, in all of his public ministry, Jesus had never said anything like that before. In fact he said the exact opposite, in *John 14:1*, he said: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me."* You

see, Jesus told his disciples those words knowing that they would always, always have the grace of God to accompany them through anything. But Jesus also knew that he was entering a time when he would be stricken and that that grace would begin to be removed, and when that happened, he would have no friends, no disciples, and because God would have to abandon him as he bore our sin, no God.

Shortly after that it got much worse. It says Jesus became "*sorely troubled and deeply distressed.*" Of course this happened in the garden. You know, it was a garden where Adam fell and it was a garden where Jesus began the process of starting to pay for that fall, where his being stricken began to play itself out. *Matthew 26:37* says: *And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.*

Again, we just look at language and the language doesn't really describe what we need to understand what was going on inside the heart and the mind of Jesus, and the phrase "sorrowful, deeply distressed," it's apparently very difficult to translate. A good way one translator suggested to describe it would be to use the term "unhinged." This is the mind of Jesus becoming unhinged, stricken with sorrow, and it's a sorrow that cannot see beyond the horror. See, in the very next verse Jesus says: "*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.*" Put yourself in this situation.

You know, no matter what happens in our life, we can always imagine, well, it could be worse. Imagine literally this not being possible. This for a human being was the worst anything could ever get, ever. You know, one commentator describes Jesus' state of mind at this point as this: To be at a loss as to which way to go. But then it gets much worse. *Mark 14:33* says: *And he took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be troubled and deeply distressed.* The King James uses the phrase "sore amazed" to translate this. *Mark 14:33*, the same passage in King James says: *And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy.* Well, it's here that the word "stricken" begins to broaden and deepen, and we ask what is "sore amazed?" Well, it's someone expecting a blow, expecting an assault, expecting an attack, and being so astounded at the ferocity of it that they are sore amazed when it arrives. One commentator said, "a feeling of terrified surprise." It's being braced for the worst yet finding my estimation to be woefully less than the actuality. The collective holy fury of the wrath of God is beginning to express itself in the life of Jesus, and he's blown away.

We say how could that be? I mean, how could it be that Jesus could be taken by surprise? I mean, Jesus was God, he was the Christ,

the son of God, the second person of the trinity, he knew full well the extent of what his task on earth would be. Well, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, the servant who emptied himself, he could only fully know the extent of God's wrath by experiencing it. Ask a mom about child birth. You can read a thousand books about it but you have to experience it. Experiencing it caused Jesus to be sore amazed. Listen to how Charles Spurgeon describes this. He says: The Greek word does not merely import that He was astonished and surprised, but that His amazement went to an extremity of horror, such as men fall into when their hair stands on end and their flesh trembles. David said, "My flesh trembleth because of Thy judgments," so our Lord was stricken with horror at the sight of the sin which was laid upon Him and the vengeance which was due on account of it. The Savior was first "sorrowful," then depressed, and "heavy," and lastly "sore amazed" and "filled with amazement;" for even He as a man could scarce have known what it was that He had undertaken to bear. He had looked at it calmly and quietly and felt that whatever it was He would bear it for our sake; but when it actually came to the bearing of sin, He was utterly astonished and taken aback at the dreadful position of standing in the sinner's place before God, of having His holy Father look upon Him as the sinner's representative, and of being forsaken by that Father with whom He had lived on terms of amity and delight from old eternity. It staggered His holy, tender, loving nature, and He

was "sore amazed," and was "very heavy." All this is bound up in that one little word, "stricken."

It goes on to say: *Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.* Well, the next word is "*smitten of God.*" You know, to smite, he smote him, you've heard that phrase before, it means to strike, to beat, to kill, to punish, to murder, to slaughter. The source here is not the Jews, it's not the Pharisees, it's not the Romans, it's not the Greeks, it's not the pagans; it is his Father. He was smitten of God. You see, God's wrath which has been stored up for centuries is now being expressed, and Jesus our propitiation is absorbing that wrath.

The third word of Isaiah 53:4 is "afflicted." It means to depress. It means to press down, to abase. Now, one can be afflicted by God, *Psalm 119:75* it says: *I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.* We also know that one can also be afflicted by Satan. *Job 2:7* says: *So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.* Furthermore we can be afflicted by others. *Psalm 9:12:* *For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.* There's a whole bunch of different sources that

affliction can come from. In this case Jesus was afflicted by sin. He was pressed down and put under sin itself. So we say how are we to understand this? How are we to understand the difference between Christ's nobly shouldering the burden of our sin versus Christ becoming our sin? And Jesus became it.

You know, I think of one affliction in particular, and that's cancer. You know, it's an affliction that takes over the cells of the body, they start to rebel within us, and they afflict us by becoming part of us, poisoning us from the inside. Well, Jesus was afflicted in a similar way not by cancer but by sin. You see, he took it in knowing it would poison his soul and it became a part of him. The mystery is that Jesus, the spotless, perfect lamb was at the same time Jesus, the living, breathing, essence of sin. So no, he didn't just nobly bear our sin; he became sin. *2 Corinthians 5:21: God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* So Jesus' affliction was sin itself, and when the Father looked at him, he saw that sin, he saw rape and murder and betrayal and idol worship and all of the other sins that exist. Sin had entered into Jesus' being like an affliction, and he willingly bore it, and in some way it became part of him, and it was that part that God's perfect justice had to judge. And the penalty that the Father and the Son himself and the Holy Spirit demanded was death.

So once again we come face to face with this issue of penal substitution in the very next verse. You see, it was our penalty but it was his punishment and *Isaiah 53:5* tells us so. It says: *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.* See, I said before, the problem that we have with God is it's really a problem of holiness, and holiness is a love for all that is good and true and a revulsion of all that is evil and false. And we respond to the presence of evil by saying, "That ain't right" or "That's messed up." God responds with a holy revulsion towards evil of any kind. God's perfect holiness is confronted every single time any one of us falls short of his divine perfection, again, for murder itself to the stealing of a paper clip. You see, it's that revulsion that produces his wrath and it is this ocean of wrath that needs to be propitiated. You know, if it stopped right there without the cross, every one of us would have been crushed under the weight of that wrath. But for reasons known only to God, he saw this as his problem, not as ours, and he responded to evil even when the world thought that he did not. You see, the cross is God's ultimate response to evil. *Romans 3:23* says this: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a*

propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Do you hear what God is saying in that passage? He's saying something amazing. What he's saying is that God's perfect holiness produced the revulsion towards sin that we call wrath but it was a wrath that has been withheld by divine forbearance. Since the first sin Adam committed in the garden, God has repeatedly passed over expressing his wrath toward those sins. And his divine forbearance, it extended backwards from the cross to Adam and forwards to today, March 9th, 2014 and beyond. What that means is this, it means that every time we sin and we don't experience God's wrath, two things happen. The universe says, "That ain't right, that's messed up." And God says: *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.* You see in other words, at the center of the universe in space and time, God himself in the form of Jesus Christ hung on a cross publicly displaying God's righteousness not only substituting himself for our penalty but also offering his sacrifice of a public display of God's own propitiation of his wrath. See, on the cross the collective wrath that had been stored up from the Garden of Eden to the last sin of the last inhabitant on earth was poured out not on us but on him. God's answer to

God's wrath was God bearing that wrath.

Now there are those who say that the whole idea of penal substitution is beneath God, and the idea of propitiation is as primitive as the notion as ancient tribes offering up human sacrifice. Some even went so far as to call God's wrath against his own begotten Son this act of cosmic child abuse. And what is missed in all of this is that the wrath of God became God's problem instead of ours. He could have expressed his wrath on us and every one of us would have been banished to a Godless eternity and the heavens would have been singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts!" But God decided to make our problem his problem. Jesus substituted himself for us, knowing full well that there was no other substitute worthy enough to stand in his place -- to stand in our place. See, only Jesus was capable of living a spotless life, and having not lived that life of flawless perfection he, too, like us would have been unworthy to substitute his life for ours and there would have been no resurrection, no Easter, and no hope. And as to the notion of propitiation being a primitive form of cosmic child abuse not much different from ancient human sacrifice, there is one profound difference that's been overlooked, and that's this. You see, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all in complete agreement as to this solution to man's problem. The Son delighted in doing the Father's will. *John 17:4: I glorified you on earth,*

having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. The Father willingly gave the Son, Romans 3:26: So that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. And the Holy Spirit empowered the Son to accomplish the propitiation. Hebrews 9:14: How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The "what" of the cross is propitiation, that Jesus Christ not only paid the debt of our sin but he also absorbed the wrath of God's holiness for that sin. The "why" of the cross is why Jesus' real suffering took place in areas we know very little about, and that's why when Isaiah says: *We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted*, it means so much more than it appears to mean on the surface. Jesus' reaction to his impending death on the cross may have appeared less stoic than others, but it was because no man who ever lived went through what he went through for us.

And that leads to the "how" part. The "how" question is this: How do we incorporate what Jesus did into our everyday lives? Well, the "how" of the cross is twofold. For those of us outside of the kingdom, there's this warning from *Romans 2:4*, it says this: *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to*

repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Do you know how that translates personally? It translates personally to me this way. There is not a single person that I ever meet that I don't ask myself this question: Is this a person under the wrath of God or is this a person under the grace of God? You see, God says all of the world is divided into those two vastly different camps, and we, all of us who are now under God's grace were once at some point under his holy wrath until Jesus, our propitiation, absorbed it. Ephesians 2 says: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

So practically speaking the question is this: How can we, who have been plucked as it were from the fire itself by God's grace alone, how can we not care about those who are still under God's wrath? How can sharing this gospel not be our most passionate desire? I said at the beginning of this message there's two parts, there's a second part of this "how" of the cross as well. It's for those who

are inside the kingdom. I said I want all of us to fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus, and the way you fall deeper in love with Jesus is by learning exactly who he is, exactly what he did, and what it cost him to love us. See, that's God's goal in the servant songs of Isaiah, because every single one of us at one time or another are going to have to wrestle with the realities of the statement that I made at the beginning of this message, "Life is hard, but God is good." And for many those words are easy enough to say but for those who are going through trials, those words can become very difficult to believe, let alone say. And when life is throwing you the very worst it can throw and you can't believe that there is a good God somehow in charge of this, God invites you to come to the cross. He invites you to study it, understand the depths of it, and to learn from it and to consider a God who would substitute his own perfect life for yours, and to consider perfection itself taking on flesh and absorbing the wrath of God's holiness so we wouldn't have to. *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he has loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* And when life dares you to believe that there is a good God in charge, consider again these words of Isaiah: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. Let's pray.

Father, I confess that we, if we spent our entire lives looking into the depths of what it is you've done for us would not even begin to scratch the surface. So much of what took place at the cross lies beyond our ability to grasp or understand. But there's areas that we can look into, there's areas that we can grow in our understanding of, and Father, I pray that we would learn how to love you more and more by understanding just what it is you've done, and when the world starts to say it's a joke to say that life is hard but God is good, I pray, Lord, that you would bring us to the cross, I pray we would have our understanding enlarged and enlightened by what it is you've done for us, by how much you have loved us, by the propitiation that absorbed the Father's wrath on our behalf. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.