

The Suffering Servant Brings Salvation

It had been years since Cornell had heard Sunday school teaching. However, today was not Sunday, and Cornell was not in church. He was in a soup kitchen, where he had landed because of years of bad choices—namely drugs, alcohol, and gambling.

It was a long fall with lots of suffering down to the soup kitchen. Cornell's pride had been enormous. No one could tell him anything, and he felt he could do anything. How wrong he was.

Cornell was a regular at the soup kitchen. He knew that Tuesdays and Fridays were days two different church groups came to bring the Word of God. It filtered in through his haze, and he remembered. Cornell recalled hearing stories of a God who was mighty, and most of all—loving.

Well, it would take a lot of love for God to reach him. *Who would want me now?* he wondered.

"God wants you. God loves you," the minister was saying. "Do you know what God let Jesus go through to redeem us? Christ suffered shame, brutality, and death so we could be healed, whole, and saved."

After the service, the minister sat opposite of Cornell at the table, stretched out both hands, and said, "I sense your heart is open to the Gospel, and you are ready to receive Christ."

Cornell unclenched both his hands and grabbed hold of the minister's. "Yes," he sobbed. "Lord, save me!"

1. *If we are suffering in some way, does that mean we are sinning? Explain your answer.*

2. *How can our suffering help others?*

3. *How can our suffering help us identify with Jesus and His suffering?*

All We Like Sheep

Isaiah 53:4-6, KJV

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.

Isaiah 53:4-6, NIV

⁴Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53 is widely known as the description of the Suffering Servant. The New Testament writers clearly identify the person described in Isaiah 53 as Jesus Christ, the Savior who comes to suffer atonement for the sins of the world.

Isaiah describes how this Suffering Servant will be rejected by the very people He came to save and the substitutionary atonement of the Servant's work on their behalf. Jesus died in our place—He took up our pain and endured the suffering we should have. No amount of suffering that we experience ourselves can ever atone for our sins. Upon the Suffering Servant, the Lord has placed “our iniquities” (vs. 5).

Further, the Suffering Servant was “pierced for our transgressions” (vs. 5), alluding to the nails and possibly the spear driven through the hands, feet, and side of our Savior (John 19:31-34). The mental and physical crushing nature of His execution couldn't be more clearly evident.

Isaiah reminded his original readers, and us, that everyone

is in need of atonement—whether or not that need is acknowledged. All we like (dumb) sheep have wandered off, seeking our own happiness and means of salvation (vs. 6.). Quite often, only after the futility of those pursuits are discovered, do people finally understand their need for a Savior.

4. *Why was the Suffering Servant being punished?*

5. *What impact can the Servant's suffering have on others?*

Oppressed and Afflicted

Isaiah 53:7-9, KJV

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.

Isaiah 53:7-9, NIV

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

Yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living;

for the transgression of my people he was punished.

⁹He was assigned a grave with the wicked,

and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah calls attention to the fact that the Suffering Servant did not get defensive, combative, or plead for His life when being offered up as an atonement for sin. Sacrificial lambs did not object when they were being offered up because, in

their innocence, they had no idea what was about to happen. Of course, Jesus had full knowledge of the pain He was about to experience, but did not protest. In this regard, Isaiah's description of the silence of the Suffering Servant is a perfect reflection of how Jesus acted as He was to be crucified. When presented with the opportunity to save Himself by calling down the heavenly host, Jesus did not (Matt. 26:53). The few times He spoke, it was to challenge the assumptions of His executioners.

Isaiah predicted that no one would come to the defense of the Servant; that was true in Jesus' case. Most of His followers scattered once He was taken into custody, though John and His mother Mary stayed by His side.

The reference to being "assigned a grave with the wicked" (vs. 9) alludes to the two men with whom Jesus was crucified—both convicted of actual crimes. One remained defiant, while the other asked Jesus to remember him in His kingdom. Jesus granted that man more than the promise to remember him—He also gave him eternal life.

"With the rich in his death" (vs. 9) is an allusion to Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy disciple of Jesus who gave up a plot in his family tombs in which to place the lifeless body of Jesus.

Isaiah highlighted the fact that the Suffering Servant had committed no crimes—in fact, He was sinless. He also spoke the truth, and never deceived anyone. Even so, His execution proceeded as planned. And those who put Him to death had no idea what they were doing, or whom they were torturing.

6. *Why didn't the Suffering Servant defend Himself?*

7. *What consequences did the Servant's suffering have upon Him?*

An Offering for Sin

Isaiah 53:10-11a, KJV

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make

Isaiah 53:10-11a, NIV

¹⁰Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his

KJV

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, and shall be satisfied.

NIV

life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

^{11a}After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

In a statement that's difficult to understand, Isaiah said that all the suffering of this Servant, at some mysterious level, "pleased" (vs. 10, KJV) God because it was His "will" (NIV).

In hindsight, we can understand how the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus made it possible for all people to come to God through His Son. However, it would have been considerably more difficult for Isaiah's readers to grasp the significance of the suffering of someone clearly innocent.

The writer of Hebrews later explained the inadequacy of all the sacrifices in the temple when he wrote that the blood of bulls and goats would never "take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Only "through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (vs. 10) could that happen. Now, those who truly want to be reconciled with God have the means to do so—and that is what brought delight to the heart of God.

In response to the Servant's prolonged suffering, the Lord would reward Him. The Servant's "prolong[ed] days" (Isa. 53:10) are reflected in Paul's words in Philippians 2:9-11—God would exalt Jesus above every other name to the "highest place" (vs. 9), so everyone would acknowledge Him as Lord.

The Servant suffered to redeem sinful humanity. Those who reject the grace of God and Christ's free offering on their behalf will face eternal separation from Him. But because of what Jesus did on the Cross, those who experience saving faith will experience eternal life with the Lord.

8. Why was the Lord satisfied with the Servant's suffering?

9. How will the Suffering Servant be rewarded?

It's Not Just about Blessings

We've created such a self-centered society that it has carried over into our relationship with the Lord. Salvation not only brought us the blessing and promise of eternal life, but it also brought a cross and commandments. We are commanded to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.

Suffering is not something we choose to embrace as part of our relationship with Jesus, but He suffered for us. The description in Isaiah 53 reminds us just how much He suffered when He did not have to. He did it for our sake. The witnesses of Christ's crucifixion could never imagine that it was their sins, sorrows, and grief that He bore on the Cross.

His suffering, then, had a purpose. He kept us from having to suffer for our sins and opened the way for us to come to God as His redeemed children. As the apostle Paul said, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:17).

As children of God, we are not suffering just for the sake of suffering. Suffering may eliminate self-reliance and pride; it can purge and perfect us. It can draw us closer to Him.

The Gospel message is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our mission isn't to see what else we can get from God; our mission is that we proclaim the Gospel of Christ. As His disciples, we pray for those He also died to redeem that do not yet know Him.

Life has suffering, but Jesus redeems suffering. It helps point sinners to Him, and it can help us to refocus on doing His will. On this Easter, the Servant shows us that the path to follow is not easy, but the reward of salvation is great.

10. *Why is understanding Jesus' suffering an important part of receiving salvation?*

11. *When have you seen God redeem your suffering for His purposes?*

12. *How often do you thank God for redeeming you through His suffering?*

Salvation and Redemption

Jesus suffered to pay the price for our sins, and because He did, we can find freedom from our sins when we accept Him as Lord and Savior. The troubles and suffering of this life may be many, but they remind us of Him and can help point us to the greater glory that awaits us because we have accepted the salvation He paid for on the Cross.

► *Think of ways you can share the Easter message of redemption and salvation with those you know who need to hear that message, especially those who are suffering for some reason. Write some names and ways here.*

KEY VERSE

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. —Isaiah 53:5, KJV

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. —Isaiah 53:5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 5 through April 11

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Acts 26:19-23—A Light to Jews and Gentiles.

Tues. Ephesians 4:17-24—Live the New Life in Christ.

Wed. Leviticus 18:24-30—Keep Land Faithful to Godly Practices.

Thurs. Zechariah 7:8-14—Ignoring God's Laws Leads to Judgment.

Fri. Nehemiah 7:73b—8:6—People Anxious to Hear the Law.

Sat. Nehemiah 8:9-12—People Respond Actively to the Law.

Sun. Ezra 10:1-12—Committed to a Life of Obedience, Salvation, and Redemption.