**The Meaning of Christmas: The Messiah Came To Die**

December 20, 2020

Isaiah 53:1-12

Key Verse 53:5 “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.”

Merry Christmas! We celebrate Christmas for two reasons. First, we commemorate Jesus’ coming to this world as a baby in a manger 2,000 years ago. Second, we express our longing for his second coming to judge the living and the dead. Who would have thought that God would come down to earth as a baby in a manger? Who would have thought that the Messiah would die on the cross for our sins? Who would have thought that the Messiah would come twice, once to bear our sins, and then to judge the living and the dead? God’s ways are higher than our ways. Today we want to think about why Jesus came to this world the first time through Isaiah 53. The author gives ten statements on why Jesus came.

1. Verse 4: “Surely he took up our pain.”

2. Verse 4: “and bore our suffering.”

3. Verse 5: “But he was pierced for our transgressions.”

4. Verse 5: “he was crushed for our iniquities.”

5. Verse 5: “the punishment that brought us peace was on him.”

6. Verse 5: “and by his wounds we are healed.”

7. Verse 6: “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

8. Verse 8: “for the transgression of my people he was punished.”

9. Verse 11: “he will bear their iniquities.”

10. Verse 12: “he bore the sin of many.”

What is the essence of Christianity? What is at the heart and center of it all? The answer is in verse 6: All humans have gone astray. All of us have turned to our own way. This is called sin. Turning from God and making ourselves our own master and our own treasure. So the most important question is, “How can a sinner be right with God?” In fact, all religions try to answer this question and all religions except Christianity give a wrong answer, namely, be good and do good deeds. But the Bible says clearly that a sinner cannot be right with God by good deeds.

Just as a lost sheep cannot find its way home, a lost sinner cannot find a way to God on his own. Someone must go and lead the sheep home. Furthermore, our sins blocked the way to the holy God. Someone must bear our sins to clear the way. Also the penalty for sin is death. Someone must die in our place as a substitute in order that we may live. Jesus Christ came into the world to die in our place. He died as a substitute for our sins so that we may live. This is the heart of Christianity. This is the meaning of Christmas.

Look at verse 1. “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” What is “our message”? It is the message of the suffering and glory of the servant through which God saves mankind from sin and death. Simply put, it is the gospel message. This message was hard to believe for the Jews. The primary reason is that the nation expected a different kind of Messiah. They expected a deliverer who would come with military might and power. He would conquer the Romans, set Israel free, and make it a superpower nation on earth, so they thought! But here was the news, the shocking news, the astonishing news. The Messiah would not be a reigning King. He would be a suffering servant. This is a new revelation. The righteous King would suffer. The righteous King would die. But he would not die for his own sin; he would die for the sins of the people. He would die in paying the penalty for the sins of his people. He would be a substitute who died in his peoples’ place. But the Jews had a problem with this truth. They were not convinced that they needed a savior. They thought they just needed a righteous King. They thought that by virtue of their Abrahamic descent, by virtue of the covenants and the promises and by virtue of obeying the Law of God, they were right with God. So this message about a savior to deliver us from our sins so that we escape eternal condemnation and are reconciled to God, was a foreign language to them. Many Christians today think in the same way. They don’t think they need a savior from their sins. What they are looking for is someone who can rescue them from their troubles and bring glory to their lives. That is why superhero movies are popular. They want superheroes to come and kill all the bad guys, and save them from all their problems.

Look at verse 2. “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” Isaiah talks about the humble beginnings of the Messiah. It all started with Jesus being born in a manger to a poor family. Joseph and Mary could not afford a room in the inn. It also refers to Jesus’ humble upbringing in Nazareth. He grew up as a carpenter’s son. The image of the Messiah that Isaiah paints is unlike the one we are familiar with. People usually imagine Jesus as handsome with long hair, and tall. But, Isaiah’s picture is the opposite. Jesus had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. He describes the Messiah as hung on the cross, pitiful to behold, hanging naked, blood covering his face, worn and shattered by suffering.

Look at verse 3. “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” All through Jesus’ life, he was pursued by nasty gossips about being an illegitimate son. His brothers misunderstood him and did not believe in him. He was called a drunkard and a glutton, and was said to be demon-possessed. Jesus didn’t even have a home to go to. Jesus said of himself, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Mt 8:20) And even when he needed his disciples the most, just before his arrest, they left him alone to only sleep and later run away in their fear. Surely, he was rejected by men! In the words of Apostle John, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” (Jn 1:11) Jesus was not a superhero. Jesus became like one of us. Jesus came this way to become our friend. Jesus experienced poverty, pain and suffering to understand us. Thus, we can come to Jesus freely, without feeling inferior and no matter what our human condition is.

Look at verse 5. “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.” Transgression is a violation against God’s law. Iniquities are our wickedness. Simply, transgressions and iniquities are our sins. Sin has very serious consequences.

**First,** sin separates us from God. God has given his commandments for the good of men. They are the standard by which they must rule their conduct, in order that the world may go on in peace and orderliness, and that they may remain in communion with God. Sin is the violation of this law, the break-up of order, the disturbance of peace, and the interruption of communion. It separates us from God. When mortal sin has been committed, the flow of divine grace is stopped, just as when something gets into a pipe it chokes it, so that the stream of water can no longer run till the stoppage is removed. Thus the presence of mortal sin in the conscience at once cuts off from the favor of God, and prevents growth in the spiritual life. The good news is that Jesus Christ intervened. He reconciles the sinner to the Father, and he takes away the barrier which separates them. He removes the stoppage which interferes with the flow of grace. In one word, he removes the guilt. That is the work of the atonement. Colossians 1:20-22 says, “and through him to reconcile to himself all things…by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”

**Second**, sin leaves a scar. No man is the same after sinning as he was before. The sin may be forgiven and suffered for, but the scar remains on his soul. A baby is born innocent, but as he grows old, he gets many self-inflicted wounds caused by sin. When Peter denied Jesus, it left a big scar in his heart. He became a slave of fear of death. It left open the possibility that he would betray someone at any moment. He could not even trust himself. Only when he accepted Jesus’ death on the cross, he could say, “By his wounds you have been healed.” When we fail a test, it leaves a scar in our hearts. It causes fear of future security. It causes doubt of God’s power and distrust. When people are crippled by past failures, mistakes, sins, and hurts, they cause deep wounds in them, and they are unwilling, afraid, or who feel unworthy to step out in faith because of something that has happened in their past. Now, we know that when we get wounded by the sins of someone else or our own stupidity or both, sometimes it takes a while for those wounds to heal.

One of the saddest things that I witness as a pastor is people whose lives have been crippled by past failures, mistakes, sins, and hurts. Even though a wound may heal, it almost always leaves a scar. My wife has scars from two C-sections. It is a badge of honor as a mother. It is a reminder that two lives came out through her pain. The thing about scars is that you don’t really notice them until you see yourself in the mirror or someone brings it up. Scars of the heart are similar. They are not noticeable until someone brings up that situation or you have some sort of an encounter with that person. Those memories come flooding back and the scar is brought into view again, the pain is remembered. Now here is the reality about the scars of the heart; they can become the thing that defines you! The reminder of the “thing” or “event” that ruined your life; the thing or event that set you on a course toward destruction, seclusion and heartache. Or, on the other hand, that scar can become the pleasant reminder of the overwhelming and unending grace of God in your life. It is the thing that should have ruined you, but by the grace of God and the faithfulness of God, you are still standing and have moved on and are able to minister to others who have felt that same kind of pain.

What that scar becomes will depend largely on how you respond to the Word of God in your situation. Even though the scar from that sin might still remain, it must not define us because we have been forgiven and set free! When the scar is the result of someone else’s sin and the way that they hurt you, you need to remember what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” The word sufficient means “more than enough to get us through.” The grace of God is sufficient and his power is made perfect in our weakness. When we are weak, when we are hurting, it opens the door for the Lord to show himself strong on our behalf, if we allow him to. His daily measure of grace can be just what we need to get through the day when we reach out to him and call upon him. When we learn to live in grace instead of the past, that scar becomes a symbol of God’s power being made perfect in the midst of our weakness and pain.

Look at verse 10a. “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin.” Jesus’ death was not a historical accident. It is the purpose and plan of God. Jesus’ suffering and death was the Lord’s will. God’s justice has declared that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. God’s justice had to be satisfied. Look at verse 10b. “He will see his offspring and prolong his days.” If you are dead, how do you see your offspring? In this statement, we have the resurrection of Christ. Jesus will see all the redeemed of all the ages gathered around him. That is the whole purpose of redemptive history. God is saving us to create this massive redeemed humanity who can praise and glorify his Son forever and ever and ever. And the only way God can do that is through the death of his Son.

Look at verse 12a. “Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong.” When Jesus came the first time, he came to die. But when he comes again, he will be exalted. In Revelation 19, when Jesus comes again, he will be on a white horse with all the saints to judge all the ungodly. This is the image of a conquering hero who returns with all the spoils of his triumph. When he comes again, we will also be exalted. We will join Jesus in the triumphant march. Jesus will share his victory with us. Jesus divides the spoils with the strong. Who are the strong? They are the weak made strong. We are the many made great. How did we become great and strong when we are insignificant and weak? By the grace of God. All that he possesses of the eternal glories of the new heaven and the new earth will be our possession as well. We will sit on thrones with him, and will reign forever and ever with him.

All these are possible through the death of God’s One and Only Son. This is the meaning of Christmas.

Today we learned why Jesus came to this world to die for our sins. Jesus did not come as a superhero. He did not come to solve our problems. He came to bear our sins. By his wounds we are healed and became holy children of God. When Jesus comes again, he will come in glory. We long for his coming. Come, Lord!

Big Idea: The Messiah came to die for our sins so that we may be healed