

**III. 2024 Global Ministries Conference**  
**Making The Most Of Every Opportunity**  
**Jesus, Suffering In Our Place**  
**February 26, 2024**

Well, again, what a joy and delight to see so many of you come back again this evening to celebrate what God is doing around the world, through our ministry partners, and to hear the word of God this evening as well from Isaiah 53. And let's turn again to the scriptures. And as you do, let me pray.

O Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, we bless you our father. That while we were still without strength in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one day. Yet perhaps for a good man, someone would even dare to die. But you demonstrated your own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. We pray this evening, Father, as we think about the cross in this great central Passage of Isaiah's final servant song, we pray, Lord, you would send your Holy Spirit down to fill this place, to fill your servant, O Lord, that I might decrease and Christ would increase, and your people would be lost in wonder, love and prayers as they consider the great things that Christ has done for our redemption. Please send your help O God. If I had the thousand tons of sinless angels, I couldn't begin to sing the depths of our Savior's suffering and Golgotha as darkness. Come O Holy Spirit and glorify the Son that He might be preeminent in all our hearts and minds in Christ. Amen.

Let's read together then, from Isaiah 53: 4 -9.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs

and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions;

he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned—every one—to his own way;

and the LORD has laid on him

the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?

<sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked  
and with a rich man in his death,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off but the word of God endures forever.

Well, as he lay dying, the 19th century German poet and essayist Heinrich Heine chose his last words carefully: , naturally. *Bien sûr, il me pardonnera; c'est son métier* which means, "Of course, God will forgive me. That's his job. And that's the mindset. So few would say it as boldly as that but it's the mindset of our age – what R.C. Sproul called the idea that we are justified by death, that all you must do to get to heaven is die and be a reasonably good person because God judges on the curve. And I'm here this evening in the name of God, to tell you that such an idea can only exist in the presence of profound ignorance of God. Ignorance of who God is, ignorance of what sin is, and ignorance of who we are.

And such ignorance is not a luxury Isaiah can afford for a member. Isaiah is a man who has seen God with his own eyes and that devastating moment of clarity in the temple when he's there doing his priestly thing quite happy, and then suddenly wham, the heavens are torn open and he sees a vision of Jehovah Jesus on the throne high and lifted up, surrounded by the blazing seraphs covering their eyes and crying out, Holy, holy, holy Lord, God Almighty, who was and is and is to come and the moment he saw God in a devastating moment of clarity, Isaiah also saw himself.

Woe is me, I am undone. I'm a man of unclean lips. I live among a people of unclean lips. He felt like his mouth, which is the exhaust pipe of our heart, as if it was full of excrement and raw sewage. And he felt completely undone and disqualified from the divine presence. And he remembered one of the seraph to rescue him from certain death flying with those tongs. I mean, this is a burning one. And he takes tongs to take a coal off the altar. He can't hold it in his hand. He must carry it with tongs. And he flies to Isaiah and touches the unclean man and the

unclean place and says, your iniquity has been atoned for your sin has been taken away, and that coal came from the altar in heaven. What is an altar? An altar is a place of sacrifice. And that altar spoke deep into the heart of Isaiah. It said somewhere somehow, someone will die to fix what sin has broken. And I'm sure in Isaiah's Old Testament mind he had no idea that the one who would die would be the one he saw on the throne surrounded by the seraphs. And in our passage this evening. Isaiah is reflecting. It's like Mussorgsky's pictures of an exhibition. Remember? As he walks through the exhibition, he sees these different pictures that inspires him to write music. And Isaiah, as he thinks about the cross he sees cameo portraits of what it meant for the Son of God to become the son of the world upon the cross. That reality distills and crystallizes into images, and there are six of them which I will move through, I hope, with some rapidity this evening - six pictures of what actually happened on the cross.

And the first is **a prisoner swap**. A prisoner swap night. The prisoner swap that, as I described, is an unusual one. Normally when we swap prisoners like Israel, swapping perhaps a terrorist in their jail for one of the hostages in captivity, you're swapping like for like -- someone who's not very valuable to you - swapped for someone who is valuable to you.

Well, the kind of prisoner swap Isaiah describes is exactly the reverse. We see the Son of God being exchanged for sinners. Isaiah calls or the scholars call this passage, and Isaiah, the **he we** passage, the he we passage. And they call it that because as you read these verses, you're constantly brought face to face with the fact that what we deserved he received and the stress falls on his innocence and our guilt. Surely **he** has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet **we** esteem him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But **he** was pierced for our transgressions **he** was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds, **we** are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. **We** have turned each one to his own way and the Lord has laid on **him** the iniquity of us all. Prisoners exchange. Karl Barth is not a good theologian. He's the trendiest theologian for young Presbyterians to cultivate in their presbytery example. But he is not a good theologian to read but he did say one or two half decent things, and one of them was at a press conference. He was asked, what is the most important word in the Bible? And he said, that's easy. The Greek word, hupier, which means on behalf of no hope without it, that Christ died on behalf of us as a substitute. Rabbi Duncan, who was a genius was asked once, what is the clearest explanation of the gospel. He said, I heard it from the lips of an African-American – a young Negro cotton picker in Mississippi. He said, **He die or me die. But if he die, me no more die.** Isn't that wonderful. A prisoner swap. That's the first picture.

The second picture, as I want you to see, is **a burden as big as the world**. You see that there in verse four? Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. At least they say, carried the weight of the world upon his shoulder. Jesus carried the weight of all of our griefs and all of our sorrows and of the sins that caused them.

Now, one of my children, Sammy, some a delightful chap. He is my youngest boy. He was born blind. His vision returned miraculously, but that presented him with challenges through his early years.

And he's a child now, entirely without guile. And I remember one time I came back home where I got a new laptop, new Apple laptops that are going to top of the washing machine, which was a bad place to leave it. When I came back, it was lying on the tile floor of the laundry room. And that obviously had fallen. Somebody had knocked it off the washing machine onto the floor. So, I walk in, I'm thinking who did this? Who's responsible? And all the kids are going, not me. They're all pointing around to everybody else -- six of them. And Sammy stands forward and says, Daddy, it's all my fault.

How could you be cross at the child like that - It's all my fault, he said. And I thought to myself, (I had many thoughts!) that's not the normal human response to guilt and blame. Think about that. Christ bore the sins of your whole life. And not just your life, but the lives of all his people in all places at all times.

Think about the lengths you will go to avoid the weight, even of a minor sin. You're leaving for work in the morning, and the Joneses are coming round for dinner. Your wife's making one of her glorious apple pies, but she's no fresh whipped cream. And she asks you on the way back from work, Pick up some whipped cream. No problem, you say. Mental note. Last thing I must do when I leave work. I mustn't forget to get the whipped cream. And the last thing you do before you leave work is to forget to get the whipped cream. You arrive home a bit late. You walk into the house. The Joneses are almost there, pulling into the driveway. Everything's ready for dinner. The apple pie steaming. Beautiful. Your wife looks at you. You look back at her and she says, Whipped cream? What do you say? It's all my fault. No, you don't. You say, You should have reminded me!! Do you know how forgetful I am? It's a really busy time at work? I've been stressed out all day. And you go into all kinds of fits because the weight of feeling responsible for forgetting a pot of whipped cream is unbearable. That you would have a part of ruining the dessert is an unbearable weight. And so you say to your wife, It's really your fault. You should have reminded me. And the response is predictable. But we're not going there this evening.

But do you see the weight of oneself? Jesus bore the weight of all of your sins, and you can't even imagine that because you're shielded both by ignorance of God. You have no idea how Holy God is and by ignorance of your sins. You and I have forgotten most of our sins. And even when you do remember, you're haunted, perhaps by something you did in the past that comes back and knows your guilt. You take comfort that nobody else knows but you. I often think of those ministers on the Ashley Madison site whenever it broke -- the fear of it being found out and then being exposed just for one of their worst sins, maybe their version. But of all of the sins you ever committed, exposed, and to feel the weight of them, the blame of them, and to know you have nobody to blame for them but yourself. It's all your fault. And to feel the weight of that. And Jesus felt the weight of that, not just for all of your sins, but all of all of our sins. Can

you imagine? It wasn't just a burden as big as the world. It was a burden as big as God. Isn't he lovely?

The third picture we see ***a bad man getting what he deserved***. Or at least that's what the Jews saw. Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him, stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. Donald MacLeod has a wonderful comment. He says, "there he hangs in agony, almost demented, bearing all the marks of a criminal, a vicious, godless blasphemer to whom the pious mothers of Israel might point as a warning to their own sons. That's what happens to evil men. The Son of God was hell bound."

And you got to realize, right, that on the cross Christ's condemnation is as real as your justification.

He didn't just bare your sins, he became it. And think about that for a second. Can you look at Christ and say, The Lord, my righteousness, my wisdom, my sanctification? When Christ says the glory the Father has given to me, I have given to you, you can look at Christ and say, He's the Lord, my glory. My father is your father. Jesus says, We're a union between us and Him.

And by exactly the same logic, Jesus can look at you and say, my iniquities and my transgressions and my sin. His righteousness really becomes yours, and your sin really becomes his – legally, covenantally, justly. The union is that close and that real and that complete. And it wasn't just the pious mothers of Jerusalem who saw Jesus on the cross like that. The father saw him on the cross like that as sin.

When Jacob came to his father dressed up as Esau and blind Isaacs knelt down and sniffed him and said, It's not the smell of my son. Like the smell of freshly grew and more and grass on the cross When Jesus smelt, when the Father smelt Jesus, it was the stench of how he smelt, not the scent of heaven and

Can you imagine what that must have been like for Christ? We talk about deep fake **AI** in our day and age. Imagine someone did a deep fixating on you doing terrible things to let all children. It was somebody else's body. But your face was put upon it and it was made to look just like you. So when they released the videos and the images, everybody believed it. All your friends at church, your pastor, your elders, deacons, your wife, your children, your mother, your father looked at the images and they saw it as you. The fact that you knew you were innocent wouldn't be a comfort to you because in their minds you were guilty. And that's Christ upon the cross as he becomes the greatest sinner who ever lived. And he went there because he loved the father, but he also went there because he loves you. A burden as big as the world.

Next image, a bad man getting what he deserved. No, what we deserve. He's just pure as the driven snow, as Isaiah says in his mind, there is no deceit in his hands. There is no literally Hamas. There's a mixture between Arabic and Hebrew and the Hebrew word for Hamas means violence. Don't know what it means in Arabic -- doesn't mean peace, but in his mouth there's no deceit in his hands. There's no violence. There's a picture of his moral purity. Is my voice, his

describing his heart, his soul and his hands describing his work. He's as pure as the driven snow. Yet on the cross he becomes smitten by God and afflicted unjustly so because of our sins.

Moving on... So we've seen a prisoner exchange, a burden as big as the world, a bad man getting what he deserves, no bad man getting what we deserved, a good man. But you understand. And then fourthly, a **beating that lasts forever on the cross**.

Christ didn't just receive a highlight reel of hell - in those hours of darkness, he didn't just get a highlight. Like you watch a baseball game when they go on forever and ever and ever right? I'm sorry if you love baseball, you very patient. And actually I've actually learned to enjoy baseball. It's a great pleasure to have a hotdog and have a cool beverage with a friend. But it's a long game. But you can watch the highlights.

On the cross Christ didn't receive the highlights of how he received it all. He received eternal hell. The sureness, fathomless, boundless fury of God. The wrath of God is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms. And you see that in those six guarantees, which are i-n-g words. And I'm going to read it to you literally the beginning, the middle of verse four. Yet we esteemed him **being** stricken and **being** smitten of God and **being** afflicted, but he was **being** pierced through for our transgressions. He was **being** crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being fell upon him. And by his **scourging**, we are healed.

Those i-n-g words have an immediacy with them - the idea of present ongoing action. It's like, imagine the difference. Your little girl calls you on her cell phone. Daddy, I was chased by a dog and I thought he would bite me. That's one thing. Imagine the other phone call you could get. Dad, Big dog, He's chasing me. He's biting me.

Chasing and biting are very different connotations in the present tense than in the past tense. Well, those words i-n-g words being pierced through, being smitten, being crushed. The idea of relentless ongoing beating as Christ is receiving one stroke after another by the fury of his father, with no one stepping in, as it were, to say, enough, he's had enough. And I don't get me wrong, because of the infinity of his person, he was able to absorb the infinity of the wrath in a moment of time.

If Christ only been a mere man, he would still be on the cross and still paying what could never be paid by a finite person. The onslaught of relentless wrath.

Now, you might ask the question, Maybe you're here, you're not yet a Christian. You might ask the question really a sin that bad? That's the wrong question. A better question is, is God really that holy? Because the size of the slip never determines how far you fall. One small step off here. It's only a little bit. It's not the size of the step, but the length of the drop that determines how long you fall.

They discovered in England a few years ago that they'd built, whole housing estates over, which is like low income housing. We call them housing estates in Britain, but housing estates on top

of disused mines. Nobody knew until one night there was an almighty storm. And in that downpour the ground was washed away and this man walked out of his back door and he stopped. And in front of him was not his patio, but a 15 foot wide and a 15 foot long square shaft that went down, down, down into the darkness a thousand feet down to water. And the scientist said it might be a further thousand feet down beneath the water. This huge pit, just one small step off his back porch, but he falls for 7.9 seconds, a thousand feet all the way down. And if there was no bottom to that hole. How long would he fall for? Forever.

And what is Isaiah saying here is there are no small sins against the great God of Heaven. His Holiness is infinite, it's eternal, it's unchangeable, it's forever. And when you sin against him, you deserve infinite wrath. It's not the size of the sin, but the size of the God against whom we send that counts and Jesus absorbed it all upon the cross. There was none other good enough, but there was none other big enough to absorb the fury of God and survive and make an end of it. Only infinity can take away infinity and leave you with nothing left to pay. A beating that lasts forever. A bad man getting what he deserved. A burden as big as the world. A prisoner swap. Those are the pictures (two more) of a beast on its way to slaughter. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned each one to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all. He was oppressed. He was afflicted, and he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter like a sheep that before it shearer's is silent. So he opened, not his mouth -- This the picture of the Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur. Those two animals, one showing the effects of atonement as the priest confessed his sins, the sins of the people over it. And it was led away into the wilderness. As far away, as far away could be -- the effects of atonement, the scapegoat. And...the cost of atonement as the other neck was cut and its life was given death. The costs and the effects and the Silence of the Lambs or the Rams in that case were a picture of the Justice of Atonement.

And Christ has nothing to say in his defense because he's not representing himself, he's representing you, and because there was nothing he could say in your defense. And my defense, he said nothing but hung his head and received a stroke. All we like sheep and it's a genius. The Hebrew is beautiful. It captures the totality of sin and individuality. All we like sheep, have turned each one to his own way. Totality, all we like sheep and individuality have turned each one. We're all sinners, but we all have our individual ways of sinning. And the Lord has laid on Him cause to fall upon him the iniquity of us all, and the word to fall upon. You might think of that heartless beast, Wiley Coyote, and the perennial rock that would fall upon him. That's not the picture. In Hebrew the idea is to fall upon or two enemies colliding in battle. Like when **Benaiah** went to kill Joab, the Scripture says he fell upon him and killed him. God falls upon his son and says, A weak sword against my shepherd, a beast on the way to slaughter.

And the last picture, a healing balm for wounded souls by his stripes. As a child and you cut your knee and you run as always run to your mother. I was a Pediatric physician and worked in pediatric E.R. and when the children would fall of course they'd always run straight past me to

Mommy and mommy would be there. She would gather them up in her arms and she'd take out the cream, and she'd rub that cream into the cut knee and say, there, there. It's all better.

And the blood of Christ is like that. It's a balm. The balm of Gilead. The Father designed it, the son made it, and the Holy Spirit rubs it in by his stripes - we are healed.

If you're here this evening and you're conscious of guilt in your soul and there's not a man, woman, boy or girl in this room who doesn't have guilt in their soul. God has provided a savior for you who's big enough and good enough to shoulder the blame of your guilt, to absorb the stain of your guilt, and to take the punishment for your guilt, not just in part, but in whole. Of course, God will forgive you. It's not his job, though. It's his honor. And you might think, Why can't God just forgive? Because God cannot deny himself. He must be just.

I think I have used this illustration before. Forgive me for using it again. One of my friends in medical school was a real detail person. He would put his bed together with the sheets pulled so tightly you could bounce a coin off his bed and everything in this room was ordered. We would go in for fun and move the eraser on his desk! And he'd walk and he'd be stressed out and say Oh No! And he would run over and straighten the eraser and then you could hear him sigh. He'd slide himself into his bed at night. He didn't actually untuck the sheets. He'd slide himself in and out of the bed and get up and fix the bed and get on to work. When he was a child, though, his mom couldn't get him out of bed. And he was very musical. This used to drive him crazy. He wouldn't get out of his bed in the morning so she would do it in the morning -- the one thing that would get him out of bed in the morning, she'd walk across to the piano and play **Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-** and leave it. And about 5 seconds later, he would run down the stairs into the living room and press the climactic "**do**" on the piano and kind of sigh.

And there's a sense we're like that as human beings. We hate unfinished things. We're watching a crime show that doesn't end and we want to see the bad guy getting what he deserves. We need the justice to be done, the crime to be solved. And you're like that because God is like that. God cannot rest until justice has been decisively done and evil has been decisively answered. And there's only two choices. Either you must answer it for yourself, or God has provided a Savior to answer it for you.

You must choose. And if you come to Jesus, he will save you from your sins. Not because it's his job, but because it's his delight and his doings and his dying has purchased his right to offer sinners a just mercy. It's practical.

Father, we thank you for Jesus. He's lovely. We feel we could spend our whole lives in his presence.

Eternity sounding the depths but never getting beyond the surface of his loveliness, his beauty, His Majesty, his glory, his kindness, his grace. And the amazing thing is, he's not ashamed to call us his brother. Pray this evening, Lord, you were drawn near and work in the hearts of all these



brothers and sisters this evening, that you would work in all of our hearts to endear your son to us.

We might love him more ardently, serve him more faithfully, and share the gospel more passionately. For there's only one name under heaven given amongst men by which any can be saved. Any must be saved. And it's Jesus. And everyone we meet in this world is either saved or lost. Bound for a heaven for hell. And forgive me, God forgive us for letting so many go by without speaking a word to them about Jesus, our only hope in life and death for sinners. Amen