

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Isaiah 53:1-7

Christ was not attractive to the Jews in their unbelief. He was not appealing to them because of His lowly origin. Christ did not come into the world with great splendor and glory, like an earthly king, but like a tender plant and like a root out of dry ground. He came from the royal house of David, but that house had been stripped of its glory. Like dry ground, it gave no promise for the future. But as Christ grew up God's eye was upon Him, and He guarded and tended Him.

Christ did not appeal to them because of His unattractive form. They said, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." The eye admires only what the heart loves. They did not love Christ. Christ did not live in a gorgeous mansion or palace. He was not endowed with riches or glory. He was not the ideal of the world. He was unpopular. People did not like Him. The truths which He taught were above the appreciation and against the prejudices of His hearers. They treated Him with the greatest scorn and cruelty. They practically ostracized Him. They counted Him among the outcast. Scorn and insult followed Him wherever He went. He was despised and rejected.

To indicate the constancy of His afflictions, He was given the title, "Man of Sorrows." Christ bore the sorrow of loneliness, character and shame. People charged Him with every crime which their malice could suggest. No matter what He said, they found something about it to use against Him. There was never a man so full of good-will toward others who received such disgraceful treatment from those whom he served.

His sorrows increased as His ministry extended. He preached, but men would not believe what He said. "He was grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He went about doing good, but they took up stones with which to strike Him. They grieved His heart when they could not injure His body. Even one of His disciples grieved His spirit by distinct denial, and another pierced His heart by open treachery. He was preeminent among the sorrowful. All men have one or more burdens to bear, but His was the heaviest of all. He came as the Messiah sent of God, on a mission of love, but men rejected His claims. His sorrow was not just that men injured Him, but that they destroyed themselves.

Isaiah prophesied that the Son of God would be wounded. According to the definition of the surgeon, wounds are divisions of the soft parts of the body by a mechanical force applied externally. They are classified as contused, lacerated, penetrating, perforating and incised. It is remarkable that in the simple statement of our text, "He was wounded," there is included each of these characteristics.

A contused wound is produced by a blunt instrument. "They took the reed, and smote him on the head" (Matthew 27:30). A lacerated wound is produced by a tearing instrument. Laceration of the tissues was the result of scourging. "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him" (John 19:1). A penetrating wound is a deep one caused by a sharp pointed instrument. Such wounds were produced by the crown of thorns which was pressed down upon His head by the soldiers, and they were deepened by the blow of the reed when they smote Him. A perforating wound is one which pierces through, as when the spikes were driven between the bones in His hands and feet. "They pierced my hands and my feet" (Psalm 22:16). An incised wound is a cut produced by a sharp-edged instrument. "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34), the water flowing from the heart. This wound was inflicted by the experienced hand of the Roman soldier, to make certain that every vestige of life had been extinguished. It was positive proof to all observers that death had actually occurred, as well as a fulfillment of the scripture, "They shall look on him whom they pierced."

All wounds are not the same. Some are not serious; they are only surface wounds and they heal quickly. Even if they are inflicted by hostile hands and malicious intent, they cause but temporary pain, and within a short time every trace of them has disappeared. Other wounds are far more serious. Some of them are deadly. They are inflicted with the purpose of trying to kill. Before death comes, the victim often suffers excruciating pain and agony. Many seem to take delight in the suffering of others. They subject them to extreme torture before putting them to death.

The Hebrew word which is here translated "wounded" literally means pierced through with some sharp weapon. This expression refers to the cruel piercing of Christ's hands and feet by the cruel nails and of His side by the Roman spear when He was crucified on the cross. Think of His stripped form when it was laid down on the cross, His arms stretched out on the crossbeams, and at the center of the open palms a huge nail driven through the flesh into the wood. But these were not His only wounds. Think of the lacerations produced by the scourging. Think of the crown of thorns. Think of the brutal treatment He received at the hands of the soldiers. Then add to all of this the wounds of soul caused by the scorn and ridicule of His enemies, His rejection by His own people and His condemnation by the Roman government.

Christ was wounded for our transgressions. A transgression is a crossing of the boundary line between good and evil, going from the right side to the wrong one, and that in strict violation of the Word, the way and the will of God. We have transgressed, but He was wounded for our transgressions. Ours was the transgression, but the wound for it was His. Never were wounds so eloquent as those suffered by our Lord. His wounds tell us about the overwhelming and crushing weight of sin. They also speak to us about love. If you want to know the limits to which love will go, look to the wounds of Christ on Calvary.

Devout Christians are moved deeply as they reflect on the bitter sufferings of their Saviour. Others remain cold, unaffected and unmoved when His sufferings are described. Can you think of the wounds of Christ without being moved? Can you remain cold and indifferent in the presence of Calvary's cross? Can you think of Him being "wounded for our transgressions" and remain unaffected?

Christ "was bruised for our iniquities." All bruises are not the same. Some bruises are on the outside only. The word which is used here means that Christ was crushed under the assaults of the enemy. So brutal were their attacks that His body was crushed and broken. He was crushed by the heavy burden of our sins, which He took upon Himself. We lived in iniquity and He bore the stroke for it. His life was crushed out under the weight of our iniquities.

"The chastisement of our peace was upon Him." Chastisement is usually administered in love, to correct a person. Parents oftentimes have to correct their children. Christ did not need any correction. What Christ bore in our behalf was punishment. His sufferings were penal. He bore the penalty of sin. All punishment is not the same. It is not always the same in severity. It is not always the same in form. It is not always the same in purpose. No punishment could ever have been more severe than that of Christ. "The punishment which brings us peace was upon Him." The purpose of the punishment which He bore was to bring us peace.

This word "peace" can be understood in two senses. In the narrower sense it means the opposite of enmity. Fallen people and the offended God were at enmity. Christ has brought us peace. He has restored the right relationship. He made reconciliation. But, this reconciliation is the foundation of so many other blessings. Peace brings with it prosperity and happiness. In a wider sense, peace with God gives us the joy of forgiveness, the favor of the Lord, the gift of His Spirit and the assurance of eternal life. The word "peace," therefore, can be taken to include all the blessings, temporal and eternal, which we enjoy. Moreover, it is well to remind you that all of these are the fruit of Christ's suffering and death.

"With His stripes we are healed." He was not only beaten, but scourged. The scourging left "the stripemarks" on His back. He willingly submitted His back to His enemies. He could have destroyed them, had He so desired. He willingly gave His back to the smiters. He permitted the cruel scourging. Made of leather cords, which were weighted with jagged pieces of bone and metal, the scourge was almost as bad as the cross. Every stroke ripped open the quivering flesh and drew blood. Many a victim fainted under this form of punishment and frequently died from it. Jewish law forbade more than forty stripes being given, but Christ was scourged by the Romans, who recognized no such limit. "With His stripes we are healed." Healing cannot be found elsewhere. Christ's wounding and our healing go together. Wounding, bruising and chastising were known by Him once in order that healing might be known by us now and forever.

In verse six we have a striking confession of sin. It says, "All we like sheep have gone astray." That is an humble acknowledgment before God of our departure from Him and our willfulness in pursuing our own sinful ways. The universality of departure from God and the universality of the depravity of man are both taught here. Originally man was innocent, but he did not continue in that state very long. Tempted and overcome by Satan, he disobeyed God and brought ruin upon himself and his posterity. We, his offspring, have followed his sad example and gone astray.

All have gone astray in their thoughts. They have forgotten the God Who formed them. They forgot His being and perfections; His presence and providence; and His goodness, mercy and truth. They forget their dependence on Him and their obligation to love and obey Him. Many, in all nations, have gone astray from God in their affections. People have gone astray in their conduct. They are proud, self-willed, covetous and deceitful. There is not a command of God which they do not break, a promise which they do not slight or a threatening which they do not despise. "There is no man that sinneth not." "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." All have withheld from God that which is His due and reserved for themselves what was not theirs to keep.

All have gone astray by choice. If Satan could make us sin, it would not be sin. All he can do is to lead us to the water, so to speak. It is for us to drink or not, as we choose. Satan cannot make us sin. It would not be sin if he could. If we are compelled or forced to do it, then God would not hold it against us. We have gone astray by personal choice. We know what God wants us to be, but we consciously and deliberately want to be something else. We know what God wants us to do, but we deliberately choose to do the wrong, when it is His will that we do the right.

"All we like sheep have gone astray." There is something pathetic and yet very painful about that simile. The likeness of men to sheep is referred to frequently in the Scriptures. The particular thing which is referred to in this verse is the tendency of sheep to go astray.

One characteristic of sheep is imitativeness, the disposition to do just what another does. One sheep will follow another without any hesitation. When one starts, the others follow in a procession. Regarding the disposition to imitate, people are like sheep. Children are that way. There is the rage for this and for that. What one has, others must have; what one does, others must do. It is the same way with grown folk. They must keep up with one another. We see it in the fashions, styles, habits, customs and deeds. This tendency to imitate would be a good thing if we always followed the right kind of leadership; but our disposition is to go astray, to follow after and to be influenced by an evil example.

A second characteristic of sheep is obstinacy. It takes a good fence to keep sheep within bounds, or it takes a shepherd's constant attention to do so. Some are very headstrong. They are determined to go where they ought not to go and to do what they ought not to do. The same things are true of people.

A third characteristic of sheep is that they are exceedingly helpless and dependent creatures. A couple of dogs frequently attack a large flock of sheep at night, stampede them, chase them, tear several of them to pieces and kill them. The reason is that the sheep are so helpless and defenseless, when exposed to their devouring enemies. The helplessness of a sheep is evident by its inability to find its way back when it gets lost. You can take a dog away from home, and it will find its way back. You can take a cat away, and it will find its way back. But, a sheep is so foolish and helpless that it just wanders and wanders, and then, when it discovers its plight, it still lacks the ability to return.

Every human being is born in sin. Condemnation rests upon every individual who has not been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Man is in a wilderness and needs a way out. He is in prison and needs a liberator. He is in slavery and needs an emancipator. He is in chains and needs his shackles broken. Christ Jesus is the way out of this wilderness, the liberator from prison, the emancipator from slavery and the One Who can break sin's chains. No one can ever be saved apart from His precious blood.

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

We cannot imagine what it would mean if man had to bear his own guilt. God in His infinite wisdom and love has found a better way. It is clearly pointed out in the words of our text: "And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Thus God devised the way of escape for sin-burdened humanity. Christ took the suffering upon Himself vicariously. The righteous God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, and appointed Christ as our Substitute. He loaded the tremendous weight of our sin upon Christ. On the cross Christ paid the penalty for our sins, healed the wounds of humanity and reconciled rebellious sinners unto God.

Christ's suffering was vicarious and voluntary. He was led to the slaughter, but He went willingly. While thus humbling Himself, He opened not His mouth. He was a silent sufferer as well as a willing one. "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." He was oppressed and treated cruelly, but He did not resist or offer any complaint. Through all the bitter conflict, He maintained His sublime and majestic silence; and by His silence He proved His greatness and glory as the Son of God.