

"MAN OF SORROWS"

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." Isaiah 53:1-4.

When we come to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, we enter, as one writer has said, "the Holy of holies of Old Testament prophecy, that sacred chamber wherein is pictured and foretold the sufferings of Christ and the glory which should follow." It is certainly one of the greatest chapters in the Old Testament. If Isaiah is the Evangelist of the Old Testament, then here we have the heart of his Gospel.

This chapter was written more than seven hundred years before Christ was on earth, but it depicts His sufferings with the minutest accuracy. It also predicts His triumph and His glory.

In the opening words of this chapter Isaiah foretells the unbelief of the Jews at the time of Christ's birth. In their unbelief Jesus Christ was not attractive to them.

Christ was not attractive and appealing to them because of His lowly origin. "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground." Christ Jesus 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. It was like "dry ground" which gave no promise for the future, and Jesus of Nazareth was but a root out of this dry ground. He grew up before God as a tender plant. God's eye was upon Him, and He guarded and tended Him.

Christ did not appeal to them because of His unattractive form. Note what they say about this. "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." Christ did not have any regal pomp or splendor. He did not live in a gorgeous mansion or palace. He was not endowed with riches or glory. As far as His appearance was concerned, there was nothing in Him to attract the eyes of the world. No doubt our Saviour by reason of His perfect character and His deep spirituality had a winsomeness and beauty and majesty all His own. But the world did not see this, because it did not have any spiritual discernment. He had no beauty that the world should desire Him. He was not their ideal. They preferred Barabbas. In Christ was perfect beauty and divine majesty, but they perceived them not.

Christ did not appeal to them because He was unpopular. People did not like Him. They treated Him with the greatest scorn and cruelty. They practically ostracized Him. They banished Him from social fellowship. They counted Him as among the outcast. They classified Him with the offscouring of society.

"He is despised and rejected of men." This is a summary of the biography of our Lord as recorded by the four Evangelists. His very first hours on earth may be cited as proof of its correctness. No place could be found for Him even in an inn. His life was one of poverty. Scorn and insult followed Him wherever He went. His life closed amid circumstances of unspeakable ignominy. In most places whither He went, several men and women flocked to hear Him. The common people heard Him gladly. But His truth was not apprehended and loved. Neither did large numbers become His true disciples. He was rejected of men.

How do people today despise and reject Christ? His glorious Person is no longer exposed to the physical outrages of men. His precious body can no longer be scourged. He can

no longer be buffeted by cruel hands. No more can man spit upon His face. No more can a crown of cruel thorns be plaited for His holy head. There is no cross waiting for Him. But, people still despise Christ. They despise Him by denying His authority, breaking His commandments and defying His expressed will. He has a right to our love and obedience. He has a fourfold claim upon us. There is the claim of creation. There is the claim of preservation. There is the claim of redemption. There is the claim of ownership. Therefore, He is entitled to be enthroned as the Lord of all.

To despise and reject Christ is an expression of the basest ingratitude. God has given you life. God has surrounded you with all the bounties of His grace. God has been patient, merciful and long-suffering with you. God sent His own Son to the cross to die for your sins. How anybody can despise mercies like that is hard to understand.

For a little while let us dwell on the title, "A Man of Sorrows." It certainly calls our attention to the actual manhood of Christ. "He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). He was a man with hands full of blessing, eyes wet with tears of pity, lips overflowing with love and a heart melting with tenderness. He is the only One to whom this title properly belongs; the only One who may wear it as a crown upon His brow, inasmuch as His sorrows do Him higher honor than the most conspicuous success ever conferred on a mere human being.

This title, "Man of Sorrows," was given to our Lord Jesus Christ to indicate the constancy of His afflictions. He changed His place of abode, but He always lodged with sorrow. Sorrow wove His swaddling bands, and sorrow spun His winding sheet. Born in a stable, sorrow received Him, and only on the cross at His last breath did sorrow part with Him. His disciples might forsake Him, but His sorrows would not leave Him. He was often alone, but never without a grief. From the hour of His baptism in the Jordan River until His death on the cross, He was "A Man of Sorrows."

All of the sufferings of the body and of the soul were known to Him. He experienced the sorrow of poverty. Oh, you who are in want, your poverty is not as abject as His, for He had not where to lay His head, but you have some humble roof to shelter you. Among the most bitter of His sorrows were those which were connected with His work. He came as the Messiah sent from God on a mission of love, and men rejected His claims. When He went to the town of Nazareth in which He had been reared and made it known as to Whom He was, they wanted to cast Him headlong from the brow of the hill.

Christ bore the sorrow of loneliness. There are three kinds of loneliness. First, there is the loneliness of solitude. Solitude is not always a hardship; sometimes it is a great blessing, and doubtless Christ found it so on various occasions. After a busy day, He frequently withdrew into the mountains to spend the night alone. Second, there is the loneliness of character. It makes a person feel isolated although he is in the midst of others. Our Saviour knew such loneliness. He was so different from those about Him in His desires, purposes, hopes, yearnings and aspirations that He was a stranger in this world. No one understood Him. Even His mother failed to comprehend the full significance of His mission. His disciples were unable to understand the meaning of His sacrifice. Third, there is the loneliness of shame. Job furnishes a vivid picture of this kind of suffering. Through no fault of his own, Job suffered reverses, losses and afflictions. Dispossessed of everything, he was deserted by his family and his friends. People passed him with averted look and cruel judgment. Even his wife wished that he were dead. So terrible was his suffering that poor Job cried out: "My soul is weary of my life." There is no loneliness so painful as that of shame, and no man ever endured such shame as did our blessed Lord. In that terrible night of anguish, when God laid on Him "the iniquity of us all," both His foes and His friends "forsook Him and fled."

People charged Christ with every crime which their malice could suggest. There was not

a word He spoke but what they would have been glad to wrest it; not a doctrine but what they wanted to misrepresent it. No matter what He said, they found something about it to use against Him. And, all the while He was doing nothing but seeking their advantage in every way. When He condemned their sins, it was because they were so injurious, but His zeal against sin was always tempered with love for the souls of men. 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; so, "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. He pleaded with them and plaintively declared His love for them, but received from them a fiendish and remorseless hatred. His sorrow was not due merely to the fact that they injured Him, but that they destroyed themselves.

Christ bore the sorrow of unrequited love. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Observe that sad picture in Matthew 23, where the Saviour is standing, looking over the Holy City and crying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Referring to the same incident, Luke says, "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it." There He had fed the poor, healed the sick, sought the lost and went about doing good, but the people had refused to hearken.

Christ's sorrow came from various sources. One was the failure of His best friends to understand and appreciate Him. Another was the frailty and even the treachery of His disciples. One of the disciples grieved His spirit by distinct denial, and another pierced His heart by open treachery. Still another source of sorrow was the malignity of His enemies. An additional source was the rejection of the people. He was rejected of men.

From the beginning, up there in the Nazareth home, Christ Jesus had learned to keep company with the shadows. Many times, while He was connected with the carpenter shop, the curious glances of His relatives and fellow-citizens, so uncomprehending, had left a wound in His heart. Once they had uttered the taunt, "He is beside himself," but long before that the reproving glances of their eyes had been as shafts to pierce His soul.

Finally, let us follow Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. Here we must tread softly because this is no place for casual saunter or mere tourist curiosity. Let us walk as on tip-toe, as though we were stealing in silence into a holy place, for Gethsemane is not like any other olive grove. There the gentle footfall of the Son of God was heard. Once on the cool night air there came the most poignant of all cries as He prayed, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." There in the Garden, One who had come to fill life full with joy tasted to the bitter dregs the cup of sorrow. Then, they arrested Him and at last nailed Him to the cross on Calvary's hill, where He died for our sins.