

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

"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. 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. 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." Isaiah 53:5-7.

Isaiah has told us that Christ was "A Man of Sorrows." Think for a moment of His exquisite moral sensitiveness in a world of sin. Think of His tender sympathies in a world of sorrow. He was "acquainted with grief," not in one special form, but in all its spheres, that He might be a Brother born for adversity. He had daily fellowship with grief, not passing through its transient experiences, but familiar with it as the companion of His life.

Our text tells us that the Son of God was "wounded." All wounds are not the same. Some are not serious; they are only surface wounds and heal quickly. Even if they are inflicted by hostile hands and malicious intent, they cause but temporary pain and inconvenience, and within a short time every trace of them has disappeared. Other wounds are far more serious. They are deadly. They are inflicted with the purpose that they might kill. Before death comes, the victim often suffers excruciating pain and agony. Many people seem to take delight in the suffering of their fellowmen. While putting others to death, they first subject them to extreme torture.

The Hebrew word here translated "wounded" literally means pierced through with a sword or some sharp weapon. There is a prophetic reference here to the painful wounds which our Lord Jesus received at the time of His crucifixion. No doubt this expression refers to the cruel piercing of His hands by the nails of the cross and of His side by the Roman spear. We know that His enemies inflicted upon Him mortal wounds. Crucifixion as it was practiced in the days of Christ was a most brutal form of punishment. Think of His stripped form laid down on the cross, His arms stretched out on the crossbeams, and at the center of the open palms a huge iron nail driven through the flesh into the wood. But these were not His only wounds. Think of the crown of thorns. Think of the lacerations produced by the scourging. 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, the rejection of Him by His own people and the condemnation of Him by the Roman government.

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

This text tells us that Christ was "bruised for our iniquities." All bruises are not the same. Some bruises are only on the outside. 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 not merely wounded, but He was crushed for our iniquities. He was bruised and broken on account of our sins. His life was crushed out under the weight of our debt.

"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. Many a victim fainted under this form of punishment and frequently died from it. "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 wilfulness 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.

"I saw one hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
He fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.

"Sure, never, till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look:
It seemed to charge me with His death
Though not a word He spoke.

"My conscience felt and owned the guilt,
And plunged me in despair;
I say my sins His blood had spilt
And helped to nail Him there.

"Alas! I knew not what I did,--
But now my tears are vain;
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I the Lord had slain.

"A second look He gave, which said,
'I freely all forgive:
This blood is for the ransom paid,
I died that thou mayest live.'

"It was for me, upon a tree
He died in agony,
And now I give my life to live,
For Him Who died for me."