



Isaiah 53:4-6

The Divine Substitute

The Song of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

[The Divine Servant \(52:13-15\)](#)

[The Divine Sufferer \(53:1-3\)](#)

The Divine Substitute (53:4-6)

[The Divine Sacrifice \(53:7-9\)](#)

[The Divine Satisfaction \(53:10-12\)](#)

What is the meaning of suffering? Why do the righteous suffer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do good things happen to bad people? You have asked those questions in quiet moments of reflection.

Isaiah probes the meaning of suffering far beyond Job. The meaning of suffering is found in vicarious, substitutionary atonement that results in full redemption of the guilty sinner. In the Suffering Servant we see the pure suffering for the unholy and impure, and the righteous suffering for the unrighteous. Isaiah sees the accumulated sufferings in the Servant's being wounded, bruised, chastised, pierced-through, plagued, crushed –not for His own sins, but for ours. He carried on His own person the sins of the world. Yahweh provided His own holy Substitute for the unholy.

In the passage before us Isaiah explains the reason for the unparalleled suffering of the divine Substitute. It is as if the prophet stands beneath the cross of Jesus Christ with Mary, Martha and John and looks intensely at the bleeding body of the Suffering Savior.

Isaiah concentrates on the divine Substitute who suffers in our stead. As we stand at the foot of the cross with Isaiah, we see Him taking our place. He makes atonement for our sin. He died for you and me. Perhaps there is no better commentary on this great stanza than 2 Corinthians 5:21. God made the Servant "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Isaiah takes us directly to the cross.

THE VICARIOUS SUFFERING OF THE DIVINE SUBSTITUTE (v. 4)

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

The word the prophet uses for "sickness" can mean a variety of illnesses. Isaiah is speaking of sin sickness. But he also refers to the removal of the consequences of this sin sickness.

But he also refers to the removal of the consequences of this sin sickness.

Isaiah introduces a confident majesty. The idea of a substitution now clearly comes to the foreground. He brings out the contrast between the righteous One and the sickness and grief of the many. The griefs and sorrows the divine Sufferer bears are not His own. The observers now realize the Sufferer is suffering because of His identification with them. He is not the target of divine wrath because of something He has done. He is dying as a substitute. He is dying on their behalf.

The emphasis is on the pronoun "He." "He bore" our griefs. He lifted up and carried away our griefs and sorrows. He lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain (NET). The divine Substitute takes the sin in its consequences that belong to us, lifts them up, i.e. loaded them upon Himself, and carries them away.

The Hebrew scholars Keil and Delitzsch are very helpful suggesting that it is, "the toilsome bearing of a burden that has been taken up." He has taken the debt of sin upon Himself, and carries it as His own, i.e. "to look at it and feel it as one's own (Lev. 5:1, 17)." Therefore, He has borne the punishment occasioned by sin and made expiation for it. The person bearing the sin is not himself the guilty person. He bore them in His own person that he might deliver us from them. This is the whole idea of substitution or representation. He became our representative for sin and died in our place.

What are the consequences of our sins? We live in a day when people want the freedom to do as they please, but they do not want the consequences of their choices. You are free to choose, but you are not free to choose your consequences.

The listeners to Isaiah's poem did not want to face the consequences of their sins. They pointed their finger and said we regard Him as being punished by God with this loathsome and horrible disease. They looked upon the punishment as the punishment for His own sins. They measured the sin of the Sufferer by the sufferings that He endured. They reasoned like Job's friends, He must have been suffering for His own *great* sins. They saw Him as the one stricken with a "hateful, shocking disease."

Those who gather around the cross shouting their insults had come to the same conclusion in their biased minds. "Let's see if God will deliver Him" (Luke 23:35). The implication is that if He is innocent God will deliver Him. If He doesn't deliver Him from the cross we will know He is guilty. They believed the lies of the religious leaders who claimed He was guilty of blasphemy. They had no idea that it was for their sins He was dying.

Please don't miss the emphasis Isaiah is making. I like the way Alexander Maclaren worded it. "You thought that He was afflicted because He was bad and you were spared because you were good. No, He was afflicted because *you* were bad, and you were spared because He was afflicted." The he adds,

Isaiah 53:4-6 The Divine Substitute

you were bad, and you were speared because He was afflicted." The he adds, "The transgressions are done by us, and the wounds and bruises fall on Him. Can the idea of vicarious suffering be more plainly set forth? . . . It says as emphatically as words can say, that we have by our sins deserved stripes, that the Servant bears the stripes which we have deserved, and that therefore we do not bear them."

We ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted (v. 4b,c).

He was a marked man. God singled Him out for punishment. God had both "stricken," "smitten" and "afflicted" Him. He was "bowed down" by the hand of God. He was "struck down by God" is the alternate reading in NASB. God afflicted Him with the suffering. God's vengeance appeared to have fallen upon Him. There is no record of Jesus having any physical illness. He was healthy. However, our sins burned like the fire of a hot raging fever in His soul. He bore the penalty of our sins. There was nothing wrong with Him. The problem is with us. We are the guilty sinners.

Our problem is spiritual. The "transgressions" and "iniquities" is evidence that the law of God has been broken. You can't miss the emphasis Isaiah makes: "transgressions" (v. 5, 8), "iniquities" (v. 5, 6, 11), "wicked" (v. 9), "sin" (v. 12). We need spiritual healing. Healing in verse five is a metaphor for forgiveness.

Several scholars point to a Jewish tradition drawn from this verse that the Messiah would be stricken with leprosy. That is no doubt going too far. The picture is that of a "loathsome, disgraceful disease." They saw Him as being severely humbled, oppress and punished by God.

They were correct in that God struck Him down because of sin. But it was not for His sins that He was being punished. It was for our sins that He was being punished.

The punishment of Jesus Christ was vicarious. The dictionary definition of the word is "performed or endured by one person substituting for another; fulfilled by the substitution of the actual offender with some other person or thing. *Vicarious punishment*. 2. Acting in place of someone or something else" (*American Heritage Dictionary*).

The apostle Peter recognized this great truth when he stated Christ "Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds we were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). He became our substitute and bore our sins.

Matthew in his gospel account quotes this verse in Matthew 8:17. Jesus had just healed the mother-in-law of Peter who had a high fever (vv. 14-15), along with many people who were demon-possessed, and "all who were ill" (v. 16). Matthew tells us He did it "in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our disease'" (v. 17).

Jesus' dealt with the root of suffering –our sin. This passage does not teach "faith-cure" theory of healing. Atonement does not include provision for bodily healing. (Cf. Romans 8:23; Revelation 21:4; 2 Corinthians 12:1-9; 2 Timothy 4:20).

On occasions Jesus did heal the sick, but He did not heal everyone on all occasions. He still heals on occasion, but He does not heal on all occasions. What Jesus was concerned about was our spiritual sickness. We are sinners and we need salvation from our sins. Jesus died as our divine Substitute.

THE VIOLENT SUFFERING OF THE DIVINE SUBSTITUTE (v. 5)

The Divine Substitute bore the sins of those who rightly deserved the punishment of God. He was the innocent sufferer dying for the guilty. He was suffering for *our* transgressions. Isaiah changes the figure from that of the sick man to one who is wounded.

Observe the strong verbs Isaiah uses to describe the extreme painful judgment of God on the Sufferer.

But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.

The thought in the word "pierced through" is a "piercing through unto death." The fact is He has died, and is not merely suffering. His death is violent and gruesome. Because of our transgressions, He was pierced through unto death. Cf. Zechariah 12:10. These are the strongest terms to describe a violent and agonizing death. Keil says, "There were no stronger expressions to be found in the language, to denote a violent and painful death."

Of the crucifixion Cicero wrote; "Let it never come near the body of a Roman citizen: nay, not even near his thoughts, or eyes, or ears."

The Servant bore the punishment for the sins we have committed. We were guilty before God and the Servant bore the guilt of our sins. He took our punishment that was due us because of our falling short of the glory of God. He was our substitute. He took our place and died our death that we rightly deserved.

Isaiah uses a series of emphatic personal pronouns in the plural —"our transgressions," "our iniquities," "our well-being," "we are healed," etc.

"He was crushed for our iniquities" runs parallel and reinforces the preceding line. He was "crushed, broken in pieces, shattered" for our iniquities. He was completely destroyed because of our iniquities.

He was pierced and crushed because of our sins and iniquities. It was not His own sins and iniquities, but *ours*, which He had taken upon Himself, that He might make atonement for them in our stead, that were the cause of His having to suffer so cruel and painful a death" (Keil and Delitzsch).

He bore our sins in the fullest sense of the meaning and was completely destroyed as a result of that punishment. Our transgressions and our iniquities were the cause of His suffering the violent judgment of God. God executed His judgment upon the divine Substitute.

In order for the substitution to be effective the innocent sufferer had to be without sin. He was completely free of any transgressions. He was guiltless. If He has been guilty it would have been a travesty upon justice to say He died in our place. Our substitute bore the penalty that we justly deserved. He was pierced through and crushed on our behalf. Since the innocent sufferer was without sin He sets us free in the sight of a holy God.

The only person who ever lived such a life and was perfectly capable of dying in the place of another was Jesus Christ. While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6, 8

demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6, 8 NET).

Our peace was procured by His "chastisement." This "chastisement" was the evil that was inflicted upon the Servant. The best translation would be in the sense of "punishment." The Servant is not suffering for His own sins, as with the idea of chastisement. The idea is that of the justice of God being served. It is the infliction of punishment and the execution of judgment. As a result of His punishment, He has obtained our peace with God. *Shalom* in the highest sense of the blessing of God. Luther translated: "The punishment was laid on him that we might have peace." The punishment of the Servant resulted in our *shalom*, peace. "

Shalom is a very strong word suggesting "wholeness," "at-one-ness," "blessedness" which is the condition of salvation. God's storehouse of spiritual blessings comes through His gracious provision of salvation. This "peace" is the result of a right relationship with God. He is the cause of our "well-being." The judgment of God administered to Him made our peace. His "chastisement" brings us peace with God. His stripes have made us spiritually well.

"As He enters into our guilt, so we now enter into His reward" (Hengstenberg).

Because of our sins God was not at peace with us. The cause of the enmity must be removed. Sin must be punished. "The wages of sin is death." We deserved the punishment because we are guilty. But the punishment fell upon Him. He was punished in our place. "The chastening of our well-being (*Shalom*) fell upon Him." Because God punished Him in our place, we are now at peace with God.

God's justice is satisfied by His holiness. God was executing divine judgment upon our sin bearer. The righteousness of God demands that sin be atoned. The debt has to be paid. Jesus Christ paid it at Calvary. One sinless, innocent person voluntarily submitted Himself to the divine wrath to pay our sin debt. Because the debt is paid God is free to give us a right relationship with Himself if we will trust in Christ.

The apostle Paul used the word "propitiate" to describe the turning away of the wrath of God that we rightly deserved. The wrath of God was turned against the Suffering Servant of Yahweh instead of being turned against us (Romans 3:21-26). This is the only way God can be just and the justify the sinner who has faith in Christ. The death of Jesus Christ as our vicarious substitute appeases the wrath of God and turns it away from us. He took the full force of it on our behalf, and in our place. What an awesome Savior.

"And by His scourging we are healed" (v. 5d). Because of His wounds we have been healed (NET). It is by His wounds that healing came to us. Healing in verse five is a metaphor for forgiveness.

The wounds were the stripes on His body from the scourging He received from His executioners. His body was covered with bleeding welts left by the lashes.

Because of His beating we have healing from the dreaded disease of sin and all its consequences. By His wounds we receive spiritual healing and reconciliation with God.

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (1 Peter 2:24-25).

It was the stroke of divine judgment that was inflicted upon Him. Our spiritual healing is set in direct contrast to His scourging. He got the divine strokes of judgment and we got in return spiritual wholeness.

Everything that would keep us from having a right relationship with God is removed. There is spiritual healing. The cause of our spiritual death is removed completely. There is healing in His wings. There is perfect peace with God. There is no greater message than that. Jesus Christ paid the full payment of our spiritual debt when He died in our place on the cross. It is paid in full! God can now save us by His grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. Because Jesus Christ paid it all we need to do is receive His gift of salvation and reconciliation by faith. You can have peace with God by simply believing or trusting in what Christ did for you on the cross.

THE VIRTUOUS OF THE DIVINE SUBSTITUTE (v. 6)

Why did the divine Servant have to suffer?

All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.

We are like a flock of dumb sheep that have all gone astray. All of us are destitute of salvation. "We walked through life solitary, forsaken, miserable, separated from God and the good Shepherd, and deprived of His pastoral care" (Hengstenberg). We are the guilty sinners who have wandered farther and farther away from God. "Each has turned to his own way" —not God's way. We have gone our own self-seeking way. We became egocentric instead of God-centered.

"All of us" has the idea of a flock of sheep, the solidarity of the people. The ones who lead the sheep have gone astray and the people follow. Israel's kings, priests and prophets had all failed. They led the people into sin. They were all false shepherds. There was no hope for the whole human race because the people of God had failed! The Psalmist confessed, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant, For I do not forget Thy commandments" (Psalm 119:176).

No where is there evidence in the Old Testament of Israel suffering vicariously for other nations. She can not suffer for others; she suffers always for her own sins. Isaiah emphasizes that the Suffering One is vicariously suffering for other people's sins. It is obvious the one suffering in this passage was suffering for others. There is no other way to interpret the language Isaiah uses here.

Sin separates us from God. It creates a giant un-crossable canyon between God and us.

Jesus' parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10) is quite fitting here. The Good Shepherd voluntarily gave His life for the sheep (v. 11). It was His clear, volitional choice. No one made Him do it (10:17-18).

"The LORD has caused" is emphatic meaning the LORD laid the iniquity on Him. "The Lord made the Servant suffer by placing on Him the iniquity that belonged to us all," writes Young. God caused the punishment for sin to fall upon the Substitute.

"To fall on Him," means "to hit or strike violently." It is to "cause to strike with great force." The strong "arm of the LORD" was coming down in swift, firm judgment on sin. We rightfully expect the hand of God's judgment to come down on us, but it doesn't in God's marvelous grace. It struck Him! It was violent and it was bloody. I wish those who constantly complain that life is unfair would get a good hold of this passage. It was unfair for Him because He took the fall. He bore our punishment. He chose to do so.

The one innocent person voluntarily submits to the punishment of God in His own person.

The only cure for our sin problem is the vicarious, substitutionary death of Jesus Christ as our Suffering Savior. Jesus has vicariously identified Himself with sinners. He are the ones who deserved the wrath of God. No wonder Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, My God, Why has Thou forsaken Me?" As Luther once said, "God forsaken of God. Who can understand that?"

Observe carefully the sequence of thought in this stanza.

- He has born my griefs
- He has carried my sorrows
- He was pierced-through for my transgressions
- He was crushed for my iniquities
- Punishment for my spiritual well-being fell upon Him
- By His scourging I am healed
- The LORD has caused my iniquity to fall with a great force on Him

What is the meaning of His suffering?

- His suffering was vicarious.
- His suffering was voluntary.
- His suffering was in obedient submission to the will of God.
- His suffering was for every one of us.
- His suffering accomplished reconciliation with God.
- His suffering turned the wrath of God away from us and we now enjoy peace with God.
- His suffering was all-sufficient for the sinner.

All of these divine statements speak of the vicarious substitutionary atonement for sin. Isaiah states and then restates it. Who can miss it!

God struck Jesus with the guilt that belonged to us. He bore our punishment for that guilt. He died for all of us including the prophet and his listeners. He died not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins that turns away the wrath of God.

The apostle Peter reminds us of the all sufficiency of the death of Christ. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

I pray to the LORD God that we will take seriously the consequences of our sins and transgressions. "*The wages of sin is death.*" However, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21a). "All this great multitude of sins, and mass of guilt, and weight of punishment, came upon the Servant of Jehovah according to the appointment of the God of salvation, who is gracious in holiness. . . It was our sins that He bore, and for our salvation that God caused Him to suffer on our account" (Keil and Delitzsch).

Please allow me to paraphrase what He did for you and me.

Surely my griefs Jesus Christ Himself bore,
And my sorrows He carried;
Yet I esteemed Jesus stricken,

Yet I esteemed Jesus stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

But Jesus was pierced through for my transgressions,
He was crushed for my iniquities;
The chastening for my well being fell upon Jesus,
And by His scourging I am healed.

All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Jesus Christ.

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries for ten years. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor and teaches seminary extension courses in Honduras.

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