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Sermon

March 17th, Midweek #5

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5-6 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Good Friday is taken from Isaiah 53, starting at verse 4.

**Surely he was taking up our weaknesses, and he was carrying our sufferings. We thought it was because of God that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted, 5 but it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all have gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has charged all our guilt to him.**

**7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent in front of its shearers, he did not open his mouth. 8 He was taken away without a fair trial and without justice, and of his generation, who even cared? So, he was cut off from the land of the living. He was struck because of the rebellion of my people. 9 They would have assigned him a grave with the wicked, but he was given a grave with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, and no deceit was in his mouth.**

This is the Word of The LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

Many years ago, there was a very powerful man traveling down a road. As his vehicle went along, he read something that he did not understand. Suddenly, someone came up to his vehicle and, having heard what he was reading, asked him about it. That powerful man was the Ethiopian Eunuch. The man who came up to him was Phillip. The text he read but didn't understand was a part of our text today. After reading it, his main question was: "**I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" (Act 8:34 NKJ)** Phillip preached Jesus to him, the man was baptized, and Phillip was caught up by the Spirit of the LORD.

The Eunuch's question is key to understanding our text before us. To us, who have heard this section often, who have the entire New Testament canon at our disposal, and who have the Holy Spirit working inside of us, the answer is simple. This Man who the prophet is talking about is clearly Jesus.

The clarity in which Isaiah prophesies about Jesus is striking. This is the passion according to saint Isaiah. In the season of Lent, perhaps no other Old

Testament reading is so often referenced. I know that I have quoted it at least 3 different times in my lenten sermons this year. You could easily work it into almost any sermon because it is the entire message of the Law and Gospel crystalized into prophetic form.

It's important to understand this section of Isaiah. It's important because it is the explanation of everything that we preach. It's important to realize why Jesus did this. Why did He allow Himself to be crucified? It was the only way. It troubled Him, but it was for this very same purpose that He was born. Only Jesus could be this servant of the LORD. Only He could serve in this way. He was the only one suitable for the cause. He was misjudged by many people, and He still is. But, when we understand this section of scripture, we see that He was judged by God for me! We pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH. YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. AMEN!

Jesus on the cross was quite the sight to behold. It was hard to look at. He was scourged and beaten

even before He was nailed to the cross. There He is, the Man who had been treated like a king less than a week ago. Now, He is treated like a criminal. This execution drew a crowd, both people sad and happy to see it happen. They stripped Him of His clothes, pounded a crown of thrones into His head, and nailed Him on a cross. If someone just wandered into this scene without any previous knowledge, they would be rightly grabbed by this sight. Who is this person who the sign says to be JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS? What did He do to be treated like this?

If you were there, how would you answer that question? What did He do? Well, the leaders said that He was guilty of blasphemy and insurrection. We know these accusations are false. Even Pilate said He had done no wrong. And yet, here He is. Bleeding and dying. What did He do to get up there?

What did Jesus do that deserved such brutal punishment? Nothing! He committed no crime. The Pharisees considered His various healing on the Sabbath to be a crime, which of course they were way off base with that assumption. He committed no crime. He hadn't said anything that wasn't the truth. Why was He there on the cross then?

When something bad happens to someone, it is a very human reaction to assume that the person had it coming somehow. He must have deserved it. That was the best explanation the Phrasies had for Pilate. "**If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.**" (Joh 18:30 NKJ) Their argument to Pilate was, "Trust us, this guy is evil" because they had nothing else to say.

But Jesus is quite an exceptional case. Everyone else is a sinner. Thus, if something terrible happens, it's natural to assume that the individuals' sin is the reason why. What did the disciples ask Jesus when they saw a man born blind? "**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**" (Joh 9:2 NKJ) When great tragedy befell Job, it was his wife's and friends' conclusion that he must have done something to deserve it.

The problem with this way of thinking is that there is a cornel of truth baked into this flawed assumption.

When we sin, of course we deserve to be punished. But we never are. Someone else is. Thus, we do not suffer on account of our sins. We should, but we don't. We all deserve to suffer because we all have sinned. But God is merciful. You can be sure that if you are suffering, it's not on account of your own personal sins. Rather, it's on account that this world we live in is still sinful.

But once again, Jesus is quite an exceptional case. Isaiah's prophecy provides the answer to the question of "why"? **Surely he was taking up our weaknesses, and he was carrying our sufferings. We thought it was because of God that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted, 5 but it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved.**

Why was He there on the cross? Someone had to do it! If He wasn't up there, suffering and dying, it would mean that we would have to eternally. He became the embodiment of weakness for the weak. He became the embodiment of suffering for sinners.

But we totally misread the situation. It's unclear to know exactly who the "we" are here that Isaiah says. Was he speaking for the Nation of Israel? Was he speaking for the spiritual Israel, that is, the Church? I think it goes even farther than that. I think that the "we" which Isaiah includes himself into is the entire human race. We all thought it was **because of God that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted.** He must have done something to deserve this. But the conclusion that is revealed here by Isaiah is one that can only be understood by faith:

**5 but it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.**

Perhaps when you read through the passion accounts, one reaction you have is that of anger. Jesus is mistreated the entire way from Gethsemane to Calvary. These soldiers had no right to beat Him, to whip Him, to spit on Him. Perhaps it makes you wish that you could somehow go back in time and defend Him, speak for Him, maybe even pay back

those soldiers. But if you had felt these things, it is an emotion that is misplaced. It is like Peter striking out with the sword. Jesus put a stop to that real quick. It wasn't because of Pilate, the Priest, or Roman soldiers that these things happened to Him. The real reason is much worse for us.

Isaiah gives us the ultimate explanation for this sight to behold. Why is Jesus upon the cross? He's up there because of me!!! This is the sad truth that we need to come to face with. I am not the defender of Jesus' innocence, rather I am the soldier who spits on Him. He was pierced because I sinned. He is crushed because MY sins crush Him. He was punished because I am not. We thought that perhaps He had done something to deserve this. But really I did. We thought that He had committed some crime to suffer like this. But really I did! His bleeding meant our healing!

I really like how Isaiah compares and contrasts us to Jesus in these verses: **6 We all have gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has charged all our guilt to him. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent in front of its shearers, he did not open his mouth.**

One of the things that this text makes me think of is Handel's masterpiece, "The Messiah". He basically puts all the words of our text to music. His music really beautifully portrays what is going on in this text. His song, "All we like sheep" is very lively and bubbly. It's exactly what we do each time we sin. We just float in and out of breaking the law. We wander all over it! We just live and sin and sin again. But then the music gets somber, slow, and serious when it sings, "*And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*"

We go astray. We go wherever our sin leads us. We all go our own way. Where does Jesus go? He followed the Law perfectly, never straying even once. And yet, He gets punished and we get to walk away clean from the whole thing.

Jesus could have said something. He chose not to. He knew He was in the right and never should have been put to death for anything. He knew that He didn't have to experience this incredible level of sorrow. But He chose to. He did it out of love. The whole world's sin was placed on Him, and it was a choice He made for you because He loves you! He was misjudged as guilty so that we could be innocent. We are healed by His wounds.

**They would have assigned him a grave with the wicked, but he was given a grave with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, and no deceit was in his mouth.**

There was never any deceit in His mouth. And He chose to keep that holy mouth shut so that we could be redeemed. He was mistreated. But He endured it patiently. He was willing to be seen as a criminal and condemned to die as one. He was willing of these things because that was exactly what we were. He knows sorrow deeply. Our sorrow is not mentioned in this text, only His. But our sorrow is certainly an effect of all this. He died because of Me. I am guilty. This is incredibly sad. But that sadness turns to gladness when it sees that Jesus didn't just have this happen to Him for no reason. He died because He wanted you to live!

Let's revisit that question we opened with. **"I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" (Act 8:34 NKJ)** We now understand why the Enunch was confused. Even though Isaiah is talking about what Jesus would do, he still realized that it should have been Isaiah who would suffer. Yet it isn't. We should have been forsaken and punished. Instead, He was. This is the ultimate example of the love of God on full display. It sorrows us that we were responsible for Christ's death. And at the same time, it frees us from sin, death, and hell forever. He chose that cross for us. When He descended from it, it looked like He lost. But once again we were mistaken. He didn't lose on the cross. Rather you won! All praise and thanks be to Jesus, the servant who suffered for me! AMEN!!!

