

Main Idea: In Isaiah 53:4-6, the prophet predicted that the Messiah would die as a substitute. In His death, He would experience three things that we should experience.

- I. He took our pain (4).
 - A. Here’s how He did it.
 1. He took our infirmities.
 2. He carried our sorrows.
 - B. Here’s how we responded.
 1. We misunderstood Him.
 2. We thought God was judging Him for His own sins.
- II. He took our punishment (5).
 - A. Here’s how He did it.
 1. He died a vicarious death.
 2. He died as a sin-bearer.
 3. He died as a guilty man.
 4. He died as an atoning sacrifice.
 - B. Here’s why He did it.
 1. It was for our peace.
 2. It was for our healing.
- III. He took our place (6).
 - A. Here’s our fundamental problem.
 1. We’re like lost sheep.
 2. We’ve gone our own way.
 - B. Here’s what God did about it.
 1. God removed our sin from us.
 2. God put our sin on His Son.

Response: Here are the bottom-line options...

1. You can pay for your own sins.
2. You can accept the One who died as a substitute.
3. You can be sure there is no other option.

In two weeks we’ll be celebrating the most significant day in the history of the world, the day Jesus Christ walked out of His tomb alive! On Sunday mornings this month we are preparing for Resurrection Sunday by gazing at a portrait of Christ penned by Isaiah the prophet. To illustrate just how compelling this picture is, listen to Arthur Walton as he shares a story from his childhood:¹

When I was a student in public school, each school day began with opening exercises. They had three parts: the pledge to the flag by the students; the reading of a portion of the Bible by the teacher; and the recitation of the Lord’s prayer by the students. In one community that contained a large Jewish population, the Jews objected to the reading of the New Testament. The school administrators and the parents agreed that since the Old Testament is common ground to both Jews and Christians, all Scripture readings would come from the Old Testament. All went well until the day that one of the Jewish children reported to his parents that the teacher had read about the crucifixion of Jesus from the New Testament. When the parents looked into this violation of the agreement, they learned that their child was only partially correct. The Scripture passage was indeed about Jesus’ crucifixion, but it did not violate the agreement, for the text came from the Old Testament. The teacher had read Isaiah 53.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ Arthur Walton, *Portraits of Christ in Isaiah*, p. 81.

Isaiah 53 is certainly a powerful text. Over seven centuries before Messiah Jesus was nailed to a Roman cross, God recorded a prophetic portrait of the event which we find in Isaiah 53.

This morning, we come to part two in our series, “*Gazing at the Suffering Servant.*” We’re walking verse by verse, word by word, through Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

“See, my servant will act wisely,” God declared in Isaiah 52:13. Last week we looked at the first six verses of our text and learned two identifying marks of *The Servant*. First, we learned that when He comes He will experience *honor*. “He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.” So Isaiah predicted the coming Messiah would be a King, one before whom all kings would “shut their mouths (52:15).”

But before the honor, He would experience something else...*humiliation*. Before He rules, says Isaiah, the Messiah will *suffer*. Many will be “appalled” at him, says Isaiah, at his “disfigured” and “marred” appearance (52:14). He will have “no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him (53:2).” This Servant is going to be “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering (53:3).”

Yet why? Why would God subject His chosen Messiah to such abuse and suffering? It’s that question that God Himself answers through Isaiah in the passage before us today. In Isaiah 53:4-6, we find out that it was God’s purpose for the Messiah to suffer and ultimately die as a *substitute*.

The Messiah, a substitute? What does that mean? When a teacher gets sick, the principal makes a phone call and lines up a *substitute*. When a ballplayer gets hurt in a game, the coach looks at his bench and sends in a *substitute*. A substitute is someone who takes the place of another, right?

According to Isaiah’s prophecy, that’s what the Messiah did. He came into the world assuming the role of a substitute, yet not just to *live* as a substitute, but to *die* as one.

I have good news for you, my friend. God provided a substitute for sinners like you and me. In His death, God’s chosen servant took upon Himself three things that we should experience, as Isaiah explains in verses 4-6.

I. He took our pain (4).

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.”

You’ll notice that Isaiah speaks of this event, though yet future to him in the eighth century B.C., as if it had already occurred. The verbs in this section are all past tense.

Surely, Isaiah begins. Let there be no doubt about this. Though yet future, Isaiah says this event will occur. We can know this for sure, the prophet says, and *why*.

To us, the event is past tense. That’s because two thousand years ago God’s Servant came right on schedule and took our pain.

A. Here’s how He did it. Isaiah mentions two accomplishments of The Servant.

1. *He took our infirmities.* Notice the first person, plural pronoun—you’ll find ten of them in the NIV’s translation of verses 4-6. He took *our* infirmities, *our* sorrows, *our* transgressions, *our* iniquities, and so on.

Who does Isaiah mean when he says *our*? Obviously, he’s including himself, but not just himself. He’s thinking of the Israelites, too. But not just Israelites, for he just mentioned the “nations” in 52:15. So “our” includes a people from both Jewish and non-Jewish heritage. And “our” indicates that this is very personal. When The Servant comes He will take up *our* infirmities.

And that's what He did. What's more...

2. *He carried our sorrows.* Some translations use the word "diseases." The Hebrew term indicates pain, both physical and mental. According to verse 3, The Servant will be a "man of sorrows" and one who is "familiar with suffering."

Question. How do you "take" someone's infirmities and "carry" someone's sorrows? The first verb means "to lift, carry, or take." The second verb means "to bear a heavy load." That's what the Messiah did. He "hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows," as the KJV puts it.

The truth is, we are sinners and we live in a sin-cursed world. But when God's Servant came to earth, He didn't come with an insulated bubble or shield around Him. No. He identified with the people He came to save. He came as a man and experienced our infirmities and our sorrows. He *took* them upon Himself. He *carried* them.

It's interesting that Matthew quotes this statement in Matthew 8:17, following Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law and others, and says, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

Think of the implications. We have a Messiah who knows us intimately. He sees our sorrow. Indeed, when Jesus came He *carried* our sorrow. This speaks of His identification with His people, of His great love and compassion.

I can barely fathom this. Perhaps you mothers can appreciate the significance more fully. A father knows about his children's sorrow, and he certainly cares. But a mother has the God-given capacity to *carry* her children's sorrows. She feels the weight of the sorrow. She takes it upon her heart.

That's what The Servant did. He *took our pain*. Now, if someone would do such a kind thing in our behalf, surely we should appreciate it, shouldn't we? Indeed, we should. But we didn't, not according to Isaiah. Instead...

B. Here's how we responded. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows [that's what He did, but how did we respond?], *yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.*" Simply put, the world responded to the Messiah's suffering in two ways.

1. *We misunderstood Him.* We "esteemed him stricken." The world didn't expect the Messiah to be lowly and meek. They anticipated a sword-flashing conqueror. So when He came as a lowly servant, and when He took our infirmities and sorrows upon Himself, we misunderstood Him. Furthermore...

2. *We thought God was judging Him for His own sins.* When the first-century crowd watched Jesus carry His cross through the streets of Jerusalem, and when they heard the piercing sound of the Roman spikes penetrating His wrists, the people concluded. "Oh, how He loves us! He's dying for our sins!" Is that what they thought? No. Just the opposite. God is *striking* Him. God is *smiting* Him. God is *afflicting* Him. God is judging Him for His *own* sins.

It's amazing how two people can look at the same evidence and come to such conflicting opinions. It happened with Jesus. It still happens with Jesus. There is no greater demonstration of love than what Jesus did for us, yet many reject His love. They refuse to acknowledge the fact that Jesus *took our pain*.

So Jesus took our pain. Secondly...

II. He took our punishment (5).

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

According to Isaiah, the Messiah would fulfill a very specific plan. First, He would take our pain—that’s verse 4. Then He would take our punishment—that’s verse 5.

A. Here’s how He did it. You’ll notice four clauses in verse 5. With these four clauses Isaiah reveals four characteristics of Messiah’s death.

1. *He died a vicarious death.* “But he was pierced [‘wounded’ in the KJV] for our transgressions.” He was pierced, a term which can mean to “bore” or “wound.” That’s what they did to Jesus, didn’t they? Spikes pierced His hands and feet. A sword pierced His side.

And why was He pierced? Isaiah says it happened “for our transgressions.” Again, notice, not for His own, but for *ours*. His death was a *vicarious* death.

The word “vicarious” simply means “taking the place of another.” That’s what Jesus did at the cross. He died a *vicarious* death. In His death, He took our place.

I’ve read that if you are looking at Rembrandt’s painting of *The Three Crosses*, your attention is drawn first to the center cross on which Jesus died. Then as you look at the crowd gathered around the foot of that cross, you’re impressed by the various facial expressions and actions of the people involved in the awful crime of crucifying the Son of God. Finally, your eyes drift to the edge of the painting and catch sight of another figure, almost hidden in the shadows. Art critics say this is a representation of Rembrandt himself, for he recognized that by his sins he helped nail Jesus to the cross.²

This is about us, my friend. He was pierced for *our transgressions*. Listen to the New Testament writers as they describe the vicarious death of our Savior:

Galatians 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law *by becoming a curse for us*, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”

Hebrews 9:27-28 “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,²⁸ so *Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people*; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

1 Peter 2:24 “He himself *bore our sins* in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ died for sins once for all, *the righteous for the unrighteous*, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.”
Yes, when the Messiah died, He died a *vicarious* death.

2. *He died as a sin-bearer.* As Isaiah puts it, “He was crushed [‘bruised’ in the KJV] for our iniquities.” “Crushed” refers to the effect of the great weight the Messiah bore. What weight? The weight of our sin.

Later in verse 10 we’re told, “Yet it was the LORD’s will to *crush* him.” But why would God crush The Servant, the Messiah, indeed, His own Son? Isaiah says He was *crushed*—that God *crushed* Him—“for our iniquities.” While hanging on the Cross, Jesus took upon Himself the load of our sin. He died as a sin-bearer, *our* sin-bearer.

Most of us have heard these words so many times in our lives that we struggle to appreciate the significance. So hear them again, beloved, as if for the first time. Ponder what really happened at the cross. In the words of 1 Corinthians 15:3, “*Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures.”

Marvel at the depth of those words. *Christ*—the innocent, perfect King and Son of God. *Died*—He who is the author of life endured the horrid consequences of sin, that is, death itself. *For*—in behalf of, in the stead of, to take care of. *Our*—not His own for He

² Source unknown

had none, but our. *Sins*—our greatest problem since Adam, stains that blemish our lives and make us unfit for God’s presence. *Christ died for our sins.*

Yet there’s more. Yes, He died a vicarious death. And yes, He died as a sin-bearer.

3. *He died as a guilty man.* What Isaiah says is stunning, “The punishment [‘chastisement’ in the KJV] that brought us peace was upon Him.” So the Servant died as a scapegoat.

I’m not sure there is a more staggering announcement in the Scriptures than the one we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin *to be sin for us.*” The only perfect person who ever walked on the planet—that’s Jesus Christ—died as a guilty man! And why? The verse concludes, “So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Yet there’s more...

4. *He died as an atoning sacrifice.* “By His wounds [‘stripes’ in the KJV] we are healed.” When you read the Old Testament you see the necessity of atonement over and over. God says the only way a sinner can enter His presence is to have his sins removed, and the only way sin can be removed is through atonement. There must be a covering for sin, a blood covering. And so, for centuries, innocent little lambs were slain and their blood placed on the altar.

And then one day the Lamb of God was slain. When Jesus gave His life on the cross, He died as an atoning sacrifice. He provided what theologians call a “substitutionary atonement.” That means that when He died, the merit of His death was applied to those for whom He died.

Again, we turn to the New Testament for insight:

Matthew 20:28 “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to *give his life as a ransom* for many.”

Romans 3:25 “God presented him as a *sacrifice of atonement*, through faith in his blood.”

Ephesians 5:2b “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us *as a fragrant offering and sacrifice* to God.”

1 John 2:1-2 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins*, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

All this brings us to the question, *why?* We’ve seen that The Servant died a vicarious death, as a sin-bearer, as a guilty man, and as an atoning sacrifice. Yet why?

B. Here’s why He did it. According to Isaiah, for two reasons.

1. *It was for our peace.* The prophet says, “The punishment that *brought us peace* was upon Him.” Peace. The Hebrew is *shalom*. Wholeness. Restored relationships with God and man. That’s what the Messiah gained for us when He died. According to Hebrews 9:15, “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has *died as a ransom to set them free from the sins* committed under the first covenant.”

There’s why He died. As a ransom, to set us free. It was *for our peace.*

2. *It was for our healing.* “By His wounds we are *healed.*” Because He experienced unimaginable brokenness, we can experience unimaginable wholeness. Does that mean if you know Jesus, you’ll never have to be sick again? Yes...*eventually.* You see, when you accept Jesus as your Savior, He gives you a new heart at that moment and the promise of a new body in the life to come! It’s as good as done!

Hebrews 10:14 explains, "...by *one sacrifice* he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." That's why the Messiah suffered such abuse. He did it for us. Let this sink in, beloved. He did it *for us!* When He died, He took *our punishment*.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon pondered this in a sermon he preached over a century ago entitled, "*Christ Made a Curse For Us.*"

It was an anguish never to be measured, an agony never to be comprehended. It is to God, and God alone that His griefs were fully known... See, beloved, here is Christ bearing the curse instead of His people. Here He is coming under the load of their sin, and God does not spare Him but smites him, as He must have smitten us, lays His full vengeance on Him, launches all His thunderbolts against Him, bids the curse wreak itself upon Him, and Christ suffers all, sustains all.³

Yes, he became a curse for us. Yet there's more. When The Servant died, not only did He take our pain and our punishment...

III. He took our place (6).

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

A. Here's our fundamental problem. According to Isaiah it's twofold.

1. *We're like lost sheep.* Think about that for a moment. How are we like sheep? According to verse 6, we're like sheep because we wander off so easily. We stray from the Shepherd to our own harm. Like sheep, he says, we've *gone astray*.

The psalmist confessed in Psalm 119:176, "I have strayed like a lost sheep." We all have. Isaiah says, "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray.*" The whole human race would have perished had it not been for The Servant.

Now answer this. Where did we go when we got lost? According to Isaiah...

2. *We've gone our own way.* "Each of us has turned to his own way." Or as the *New Living Translation* puts it, "We have left God's paths to follow our own."⁴

This is a serious problem. Do you want to know why the world is in the mess it's in? Right here's the answer. We were created by God to live for God and were placed on this earth to live *God's way*. But we have gone *our own way*.

A hammer is a great tool. But it's only a great tool when you use it for the purpose for which it was made. If I use a hammer to cut a board, I'll have a mess on my hands. It wasn't designed to cut things.

If a person has sex outside of marriage, there will be disastrous results. Why? The problem isn't sex. Sex is a good gift from God, but He intended we enjoy this gift in a certain way, within the boundaries of a marriage covenant. When we leave God's way and start living our own way, we always end up with a mess on our hands.

If a man pours his life into his job and puts God on the sidelines, with no meaningful time left for his family and his church, he's in trouble and will soon have a mess on his hands. Why? Because work is bad? No, because God never intended life to revolve around work.

Friends, we're in trouble any time we ignore and violate the intent of our Creator. Yet that's what we all do. From birth, we enter the world with a desire to live life *our way* instead of *His way*. That's our fundamental problem.

³ Charles Spurgeon, *Twelve Sermons on the Passion and Death of Christ*, p. 64.

⁴ Romans 3:10-12 "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

But I have good news for you, if you're in Christ.

B. Here's what God did about it. Two things...

1. *God removed our sin from us.* Verse 6 refers to it as our "iniquity." God took our sin from us and did something with it. What?

2. *God put our sin on His Son.* "The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." But why would God do that to His Son? Why would He place our iniquity on Him? A. H. Strong sums it up, "God requires satisfaction because He is holiness, but He makes satisfaction because He is love." So to satisfy His holiness, He put our sin on Jesus.

Oh, the incredible love God has for His undeserving people!

Jesus put it this way in Matthew 18:12-14, "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way *your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.*"⁵

During the Middle Ages there was a popular story which circulated about Martin of Tours, the saint for whom Martin Luther was named. It was said that Satan once appeared to St. Martin in the guise of the Savior himself. St. Martin was ready to fall to his feet and worship this resplendent being of glory and light. Then, suddenly, he looked up into the palms of his hands and asked, "Where are the nail prints?" Whereupon the apparition vanished.⁶

Friends, the world is full of people who believe in a Jesus who was merely a good man. Satan doesn't mind that at all. Even a great man, yes, the *greatest of men*. Satan still doesn't mind. Until you mention the cross. Satan hates the cross.

Do you know why? Because without the cross, there is no hope for sinners. A sinner who does a million good deeds is still under the condemnation of God for his sins. A sinner cannot save himself by his own efforts. There is no salvation apart from the cross.

Oh, dear friend, have you come to grips with what took place on the cross? Have you grasped, not just that Jesus died, millions know that, but *why* He died, and *what* He accomplished in His death?

You say, "I'm not sure. How can I tell?" Here's how. You'll be able to say what Isaac Watts said. Listen carefully to his words and see if they express the cry of your heart.

*Alas, and did my Savior bleed,
And did my Sov'reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?*

*Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown,
And love beyond degree!*

⁵ Peter says, "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:25)."

⁶ Source unknown

*Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When Christ the mighty Maker died
For man, the creature's sin.*

*Thus might I hide my blushing face
While Calvary's cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt mine eyes to tears.*

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do.⁷*

Can you say that? Is Isaac Watts' testimony *your* testimony? You say, "I'm still not sure. Make it simpler for me." Alright, here is the bottom line. We have learned from God's Word this morning that in the plan of God His Son died as a substitute. In His death, He took our pain. He took our punishment. He took our place. And then three days later He conquered death, and now the empty tomb is proof that God accepted Jesus' work as a substitute.

That being the case, you now have three options...

1. *You can pay for your own sins.* A holy God will not tolerate sin. Justice demands that sin be punished. Every sin must be paid for. "The wages of sin is *death* (Rom 3:23)." The penalty for your sins and mine is death, eternal death.

So here's the first option. You can pay that penalty yourself. You can pay for your own sins by spending eternity cut off from God in a place where the fire never dies. Or...

2. *You can accept the One who died as a substitute.* Jesus' death on the cross is a historical fact. And God's assessment of His death could be no clearer—we've seen it this morning in Isaiah 53. But to benefit from Jesus' death, something must occur. The sinner must *accept* Him.

"The life of Christianity consists of possessive pronouns," said Martin Luther. "It is one thing to say, 'Christ is a Savior.' It is quite another thing to say, 'He is my Savior and my Lord.' The devil can say the first; the true Christian alone can say the second."⁸

Can you say it? Have you by grace accepted the One God sent to die as a substitute? Is He *your* Savior and Lord? My friend, these are the options, indeed, the *only* options. You can pay for your own sins, and do so forever and ever and ever, *or* you can accept the One who one day nearly two thousand years ago died as a substitute. Which will it be? What will you do with Jesus Christ? One more thing must be said...

3. *You can be sure there is no other option.* Jesus Christ did not endure what we've considered this morning to be simply one option on the shelf. *I am the way*, He said. *No one comes to the Father but by Me.*

⁷Joyful Noise Music Company, *Logos Hymnal*, (Fort Worth, TX: Joyful Noise Music Company) 1994.

⁸*Resource*, July/August, 1990.