

Christ Did It!
Reflections on Isaiah 53
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Often, we give attention to Christ's Last Supper, his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial during the Holy Week. Those events are significant indeed. However, the entirety of Jesus' life was suffering as depicted in Isaiah 53. The passion of Jesus Christ commenced from his incarnation as captured by Isaiah 53. Therefore, let us journey to the cross, in our own ways during this Holy Week leading to Easter.

Day One
The Messiah's Humble Human Form
Isaiah 53:2; Phil. 2:6-8

Have you asked yourself what if you were another being? What about living in a place, culture, city, or neighborhood foreign to you? I used to train college students and staff, most of them headed to developing nations for a short-term mission. I recall the excitement of the trainees. Similarly, their fears, anxieties. As someone who grew up in foreign country, I shared their emotions as well. Living in an unfamiliar place is tough. Then consider Jesus Christ, our Savior, indeed God, who lived on earth 33 years. While on earth, God experienced humanity. How difficult that might have been for God to bear human flesh. As St. Anselm, Bishop of Canterbury, put it: Christ did this for me, because of us, for our salvation. Jesus Christ was still God while on earth, but he also possessed a human form, a nature that was foreign to God.

Christ was conceived in the womb like any other human being, Christ developed gradually for nine months in the womb of Mary his mother, Christ subjected himself to life in the womb and all of what it means to be in the womb. Then Christ was born as a baby. That is, God became a baby and we see images of Jesus as a baby which are fancy, but that is our human imaginations. None of us can accurately capture the spirit of Christ in human form. Christ took on a body that was contrary to his original nature as God. Isaiah 53:2 says,

**For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.**

Born in a manger, by poor parents, under foreign and oppressive political authority, very few people were attracted to Christ. Christ grew up an ordinary person and not like the son of a king. The claims for Christ's divinity were misconceived, and his birth did not attract attention, except from the authorities that sought his death even as a baby. Christ's human form was contrary to his divine nature. For instance, Christ shared our human traits—he was hungry, tired, rested, grieved. In his youth through young adulthood, Christ worked long hours as a carpenter and Christ walked long distances to and from Jerusalem for the annual Jewish festivals. Similarly, during his ministry, Christ mingled, talked, and touched sinners. Christ, by taking humanity, redeemed and restored the glory that was lost during the fall as stated in Romans 8:3-4:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The humble human form of Christ was substantial for our redemption. As believers, we no longer bear the image of sinful humanity in the order of Adam, but a restored humanity—a new flesh and a new spirit—through Christ. Therefore, we must take on the form of Christ and align our lives with servant humble spirit. In Christ, through Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are “*saints of God!*”

Day Two
Despised and Rejected
Isaiah 53:3; John 1:9-13

Have you ever received a letter of denial of admission to your school of choice or employment? There are numerous forms of rejections such as exclusion from a class, social group, or family. If so, recall your experience. Even for someone lacking this experience, social standards inform us that rejection is very painful. About 700 years before his birth, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would experience these emotions:

**He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

This prophecy was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Being God in human form was contrary to the character of the Messiah as speculated by the people during the time of Jesus Christ on earth. It was hard for them to conceive that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. They thought it was not fitting for the Messiah to be humble, a servant, and divine as taught by Jesus Christ. Consequently, the people had low opinions or misconceptions about Christ. Some people hated, scorned, ridiculed, or mocked him due to his message of salvation. The message that pierced others the most was his claim to destroy and rebuild the temple in three days.

Many people rejected Christ. Few family members accepted him as the Messiah and the rest of them disparaged and scorned him. James, his biological brother, only became a believer after Christ's resurrection. The religious leaders—the Pharisees and Sadducees—opposed him, and he did nothing right in their eyes. Similarly, the high-priest and the Roman authorities dissented Jesus Christ. Throughout his ministry, the religious authorities constantly challenged his wisdom and contested his knowledge. Christ's disciples disowned him the moment he was arrested and put to trial. After three years of ministry, one would have expected his followers to number in thousands. However, that was not the case. During Christ's trial the crowd, in disbelief, disapproved and rejected him. Christ endured all forms of rejection and detestation joyfully, willingly, and obediently, all for me, all for us. John 1:9-12 puts it clearly:

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Today too, there are many people who despise and reject Jesus Christ and his followers. Not only that, but they also reject the gift of forgiveness and counter the spread of the gospel. However, those attempts will not succeed because of Easter! So, Hallelujah! We must stay the course and proclaim Christ.

Day Three
Man of Sorrows
Isaiah 53:3-4; 10-11

Let us consider another dimension of Christ's suffering, the bearing of sorrows and grief. As foretold by Isaiah, Jesus Christ was a sorrow-filled person. Christ embodied pain and hurt. He

was in agony; a fitting image is that of a king crowned with thorns. Christ carried a heavy heart, so his entire life was filled with sorrows. This does not imply that Christ lacked joy. His obedience to God the Father brought him boundless joy and satisfaction according to Isaiah 53:10-11a:

**When his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied.**

But sorrows characterized his life, for the Messiah was sad about the human condition and amid stiff opposition. Jesus Christ lived and experienced sorrows because of the brokenness of the people, their unbelief, which is the consequence of sin. God cares deeply for his people, loves them, and aches for them. As a result, God relates with his people and in that arrangement God is merciful. God's mercy elicits empathy, and subsequently, sorrow. According to Genesis 6:5-6, God grieves over sin and evil. God grieves when his people suffer according to Exodus 3:7-8 and our rebellion and disobedience grieve God as well. So, the wicked act in the world grieves God and God sorrows for the sin of the people (Psalm 70:8). Therefore, Christ was:

**a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.**

For instance, Christ wept over the death of Lazarus. Similarly, Christ was sorrowful over the fate of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). The events of Holy Week were the crescendo of sorrows for Christ. From his arrest to the end of his trial, Christ suffered pains for himself and bore the sorrows of the world. On the cross, Christ suffered for us, but he also bore our sorrows so that we must not experience pains and even when we do, we have comfort and hope that those pains are in God. God is with us in our sorrows. A Christian life entails suffering and the degree of suffering differs. So, whatever hurt you carry, whatever sorrow, release them to Jesus Christ. Christ is willing to provide a shoulder and to support us in our grief. Despite the victory of the cross, God does not rejoice over unbelief, so the cross of Jesus Christ is a symbol of God's reaction to sin and also an invitation to Jesus Christ.

Day 4

Christ was 'Oppressed and Afflicted' Isaiah 53:7-7; Matthew 26:59-66, 27:14

**He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?**

Christ was sorrowful because he experienced cruelty. This aspect of suffering is rendered in our passage as oppression. Oppression is to exercise power over an individual. However, not every form of authority exercised is oppressive. The intent of power exerted matters. Hurt is the goal of oppression, especially in the case of Jesus Christ. In oppression, the intention is evil; that act is to dominate, conquer, and defeat in body and in spirit. Oppression implies that the victim lacks worth and is not comparable to the status of those exercising such powers, as seen in the cruelty Joseph suffered from his brothers and later, Israel in Egypt. In that encounter the people of Israel lost their freedom; in return, they served Pharaoh and Egypt for free, building roads and other forms of forced labor. What Pharaoh feared most about Israel was their population. Therefore, Pharaoh oppressed Israel; he wanted to eliminate them, as evidenced in the case of their male children.

There are many forms of oppression. But whichever form it takes it inflicts and causes suffering. Affliction tortures the body and mind. The Messiah experienced all this. According to Matthew 26:59-72:14. He was oppressed in some of these ways:

- The authorities wanted to get rid of Jesus, therefore they ignored the due process of the law.
- He was persecuted.
- He was coerced.
- He was falsely accused.
- He was treated harshly.
- He was humiliated.

- He was convicted and condemned without due process.
- After the verdict, Jesus Christ was constrained, tormented and crucified—the savior faced all those evils. **“By oppression and judgment, he was taken away.”**

However, through the process of *oppression and affliction*, Christ fulfilled the legal demand of the law for our redemption. The good news is, Christ suffered oppression and affliction, thereby freeing us from every form of oppression, especially by Satan. There is nothing more damaging than living under the power and influence of sin. Sin torments, sin oppresses, controls, and leads to destruction. But Christ has rescued us from the power and dominion of sin. We are set free from the power of darkness and the influence of evil; these should not control us. But there are numerous people today under the bondage of Satan. Satan exercises his power and dominion over them, resulting in all kinds of lifestyles. Only the gospel of truth will release them from the power and control of Satan. For believers, we must present ourselves as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to Christ. Our gratitude to Jesus Christ and God is to live righteously for Him.

Day 5

Pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.

Isaiah 53: 5-6; 9-12

Transgression also means rebellion. In most instances in Scripture, it is used in reference to sin or disobedience against God. This means sin is first Godward—it affects God; sin is disobedience to God’s commands, law, or rule. This aspect of sin is noticed in the Bible in the behavior of Adam and Eve when they broke God’s command by eating the forbidden fruit. According to the Scripture, Adam and Eve were our first parents as well as our representatives. Therefore, all people, the entire humanity sinned in Adam. Adam’s and Eve’s transgressions became our transgressions because we are their offspring.

**upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.**

**All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—everyone—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.**

Not only are we guilty of Adam's sin, but likewise our sin—our actual sins—because of the first incident of sin. Sin separated us from God, for no one could go directly to God unless through a medium, hence the Old Testament sacrifices. Those sacrifices were temporary measures to deal with sin, but they also pointed to a greater event, in the person of the Messiah, as our Scripture points out. Therefore, Jesus Christ suffered because of our sins; he was nailed on the cross for the propitiation and expiation of sin. God sacrificed Jesus for those sins—the sins of the world were placed on Christ. Christ completely atoned for those sins; Christ has paid it all through His death and resurrection. Our debts are paid for; we are justified and declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.

On the cross, Jesus Christ performed two important roles simultaneously. Christ took the penalty for our sins and Christ was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Implied here are the qualifications and nature of the Messiah. The Messiah was sinless. For in God's economy of salvation, only the sinless person could suffer on behalf of another or others. Christ satisfied God's absolute demands for sin. This is the reason God came down in human form. The Messiah became our substitute; Christ took our place. Instead of you, instead of me, Christ suffered and died according to Scripture:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. —2 Cor. 5:21

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. —1 Peter 2:24

Jesus Christ satisfied the demands of God and reconciles us with God. Christ bridged the hostility, estrangement, and enmity that existed between God and humanity, and anyone who believes is no longer condemned but has life abundantly through Jesus Christ. In addition, we have fellowship with God; we can come to him anytime, anywhere.