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I always thought that I would be able to worship God more than some because of what I had come from... like when Jesus said to the Pharisee in Luke 7, "Whoever has been forgiven of little loves little, and whoever has been forgiven of much loves much." But God has shown me through people who, in the world's estimation, have not sinned much, that they recognize their need for a Savior just as much as I do. It's not that the Pharisee didn't need just as much forgiveness as the woman who wept at Jesus feet and wiped His feet with her tears and poured the alabaster filled ointment on His tear-stained feet. It's that he didn't see it because of his pride! (And I was actually being pretty arrogant thinking I could worship God better than others.) My friend, I pray that you and I will see the equal depth of our need for Jesus today SO THAT we can experience the fullness of His merciful love!

*Blessings,
Jonna*

Isaiah 53 ~

I remember going to a Jewish synagogue with Tim years ago. The people were so nice to us. They invited us to stay after their service to talk. Tim talked with a young guy who told him that his favorite book to study is Leviticus... which is all about the law! Wow. That would NOT be my go-to book. Tim asked him what he thought about the Book of Isaiah. (Isaiah was written over 700 years before Jesus came as a man, but is called "the 5th gospel" by some scholars because it is so full of prophecies about Jesus.) The young man told Tim that he wasn't interested in Isaiah. Wow. The truth of the Messiah was right there for him, but he didn't want to see it. How often is the truth there for me, but I don't want to see it? O Lord, as I study this prophecy of Jesus in Isaiah 53, please remove any spiritual blindness and pride so that I can celebrate You more. The fact is, the more I see You, the more I see reason to worship You. It is not that You grow to be more worthy. It's that my vision gets clearer and clearer to see what was there the whole time.

Vs. 1 ~ "Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord

been revealed?"

O Lord, open my ears to hear the message. Open my eyes to see the victorious arm of the Lord in the life of Jesus Christ. It is with my ears I hear, and with my heart that I believe... so that I can see You better.

What is it that I need to hear and see?

Vs. 2 ~ "For He (Jesus) grew up before Him (the Father) 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."

Wait... "the arm of the Lord" represents victory! How is this a description of victory? He was nothing to look at. But "though man looks at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). In order to gain the victory, Jesus had to empty Himself of His glory, form (of God, taking the form of a servant), majesty, and beauty. These were all His from before the beginning of time, but He laid them down for me. And the Father saw Him... growing like a root out of dry ground... He did the impossible. He thrived in a wasteland of rejection for a people who despised Him and wanted to see Him dead.

Vs. 3 ~ "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."

Wow. Jesus came down from His throne in heaven where He was worshiped night and day, where His majesty and splendor were awesome even to those who men on earth would try to worship at their feet... the angels. But the angels knew... their own glory and splendor were just specks of dust in the light of the glory of God. Jesus came here knowing He faced the hatred of men who He was going to die for. Jesus became a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief, in order to take away MY sorrow and grief. And I didn't even want Him. Even now as a believer in Christ, I battle the ever-present struggle of wanting what He can do for me MORE than wanting Him! This is why He chose to die! If I were in His shoes, this would be why I would choose to annihilate me. But that's not His heart.

Vs. 4 ~ "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted."

Oh my goodness... He has seen every trial that grieves me and every sorrow that crushes my heart, and He took it upon Himself... even when I wanted nothing to do with Him. Where was God when I was hurting and struggling? He was right here with me... hurting with me and wanting to be my comfort. And yet I chose other forms of escape. Even now, when I'm hurting, my first thought is to find an escape rather than to take refuge in my Lord. O Lord, open my eyes to see that You are both the God who says, "In all my affliction, You are afflicted" (Isaiah 64:9) AND who says, "I am the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort who comforts you in ALL your affliction" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Vs. 5-6 ~ "But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; 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—every one—to His own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Oh wow. This starts, "BUT." Even though we esteemed Him stricken... even though the people on the day of His crucifixion saw Jesus as being abandoned by the Father... even though the people on that day saw Him as just another man who was going to die... BUT... He was nailed to the cross for MY sins, NOT His. He who knew no sin became sin for ME. He was crushed, not because of HIS guilt, but because of MINE.

Upon Him was the chastisement that brought ME peace. He is the God of peace. This blows my mind. He took the full penalty of the wrath of God SO THAT I can have peace. This is why Psalm 103:9 says, "He will not always chide," meaning, "He will not always point the finger at me because of my guilt." Instead, the Father pointed the finger at His innocent Son in my place... and THAT is my peace. Because of Jesus, Romans 5:1 is true for me, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That peace cost me nothing, but it cost Him everything.

With His wounds I am healed. What is the greatest healing I need over all others? I need the eternal healing of my sin diseased body that would have left me diseased forever. Any physical pain or disease I have now is just temporary. But He took the wounds that I deserved and healed me instead. He bears the scars of those wounds for all eternity. O Lord, let me never forget. Let me never be deceived. Let me never minimize what You've done for me.

Vs. 7-8 ~ "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?"

The Pharisees and the people who cried out, "Crucify Him" oppressed and afflicted Him. Pilate, who said he saw no guilt in Jesus still had Him flogged and killed. I have wounded Jesus so many times with my lack of faith and my accusations that were all lies. And yet... He who could have called down legions of angels and wiped out mankind... He who holds the universe together by the word of His power... He who IS the Word in flesh... stayed silent. The Lamb of God remained silent even among all the mocking and humiliation and accusations.

From their perspective, the religious leaders were judging Him and using God's name to do it. From God's perspective, He was letting His Son die for the sake of the sins of all His people who needed to be delivered from the domain of darkness and didn't even know it. I needed to be delivered from the domain of darkness, and I didn't even know it.

Vs. 9 ~ "And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth."

This is another part of the prophecy that blows my mind. They were going to bury Jesus in a grave for the poor and criminals, bought with the 30 pieces of silver that had been given to Judas as payment for betraying Jesus. But Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, got permission to place Jesus in his unused tomb. (Don't worry, Joseph... you were always gonna get it back.)

Jesus was placed in that tomb after being illegally tried and executed on a cross... and He was absolutely innocent. He spoke NO deception. He is without sin so He will NEVER speak deception. Jeremiah 17:9 says that "MY heart is deceitful above ALL things". Multiple scriptures speak of me needing to be watchful and sober minded because my natural tendency is to drift toward deception. But GOD will NEVER deceive me. There is not one speck of sin or evil in Him. He doesn't even contain the ability to sin and deceive because it is so completely foreign to who He is.

If there is anything I need to grow in trusting, this is it. God will never tempt me to do evil. He will never deceive me. He will never sin against me. If I don't understand this, it is not because God needs to change, it is because my heart needs to change. O Lord, open my eyes... enlighten my heart... so that I never question Your perfect holiness and goodness ever again. If I ever do wonder, all I have to do is look to the cross that Jesus suffered for me and the empty grave that made me alive together with Him.

Vs. 10 ~ "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; 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."

Jesus was innocent and yet He died. Why? Because it was the Father's will to crush Him and allow His suffering. That sounds cruel! But it isn't. Jesus willingly gave up His life... for me. When God allows ME to suffer and even feel the weight of the brokenness of this world, His motive is never for my destruction. It is for my hope. The Lord, who gave up His Son for me graciously works ALL things together for my good. Praise His name!

Let me never forget the hope! Yes, the Father allowed His Son to be crushed, BUT the Son shall SEE His offspring... because the Son shall live and make it possible for there to BE offspring. Galatians 4:4-5, written over 700 years after Isaiah 53 and after Jesus rose from the dead, confirmed the truth of this verse. It says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

The Lord has prolonged His Son's days... for all eternity. He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand. Jesus is alive. And the will of the Lord shall prosper in the hands of Jesus. Jesus is continuing to make His Father's name known so that more can come to Him for salvation through Jesus. The actual Hebrew says, "the PLEASURE of the Lord shall prosper

in His hands." It brings the Father pleasure to see many lives transformed to be like Jesus. Absolutely beautiful.

Vs. 11 ~ "Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous one, My servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities."

Out of the anguish of His soul... He will see that His suffering was not in vain. Many people will turn to God in repentance for salvation. By His knowledge, He will justify me so that I'm treated with the same righteousness as Jesus, even though I deserve death. He will do this by taking my guilt on Himself. This blows my mind.

Vs. 12 ~ "Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

Therefore, since God has given me life through taking my sin and punishment upon Himself so that I'm justified and have peace with Him, the Father will bring many people to Him in repentance, and all who find their strength in Him will share in His blessings and gifts. None of this comes as a result of anything I did. It all comes because of Him. For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross as He poured His soul out to death. He was counted among the sinners, though He had committed no sin. Why did He do all this? For me.

The reason He poured His soul out to death was to bear my sins. The reason He allowed Himself to be numbered with the transgressors was so that He could intercede for me. Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 both say that Jesus is alive and well... interceding for me.

Do I believe the message of the gospel? Has the arm of the Lord been revealed to me? Yes. How then do I respond to this? Hear the message. Believe the message. Humble myself before the Lord. Trust the Lord. Love the Lord. Worship the Lord. Celebrate the hope I have in the Lord. This is all true... planned before time began. "He who has prepared us for this very thing... eternal life in Him... is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 5:5). Amen!