

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

Suffered Under Pontius Pilate

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Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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Introduction:

Good morning Cornerstone and Redeemer! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 52.

Today we come to a shocking turning point in the Apostle's Creed. It probably didn't feel shocking to you as you heard the creed recited a few moments ago, but it SHOULD have.

Imagine for a moment that you had no prior understanding of Christianity. You begin to read through this creed, and you learn that Jesus Christ, God's only Son and our Lord has come to the earth. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of a virgin Mary – so he's a miracle child! He's the Godman! And he's walking on the planet that he spoke into existence! What should the next line in the creed be? You'd expect to read something like:

“he overthrew the corrupt politicians and took his rightful seat on the throne”

Why not? It's his world! Why shouldn't he force his way to the top? The powers that be were doing an AWFUL job! Why shouldn't he politicize his movement? This is what the Jews were expecting, and it's why they didn't recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah. Or you might expect the next line to read:

“he grew in power and prestige and called down fire from heaven to destroy his foes”

Why not? He was the GODMAN! And people treated him terribly! The Maker of heaven and earth condescended down to his creation and they MOCKED him! The gods of Roman mythology wouldn't have stood for that.

The reality is that no one was ready for what came next. The second Person of the Trinity came to the earth – the earth that he had spoken into existence – and:

“he suffered under Pontius Pilate”

As Ben Myers notes:

Already among the earliest Christians it had become customary to sum up Jesus' whole life under one word: “suffering.”¹

Jesus' earthly ministry was not summarized with any of the words that we might expect. It wasn't a life of triumph, or leisure, or applause, or victory. No, Jesus' earthly life was a life of suffering.

Look with me now to Isaiah 52 beginning in verse 13. We're going to read all the way to the end of chapter 53. Our text this morning represents the fourth and final servant song in the book of Isaiah and it was written 700 years before the birth of Jesus. This song – this prophecy – proclaimed that one would come – a servant of God – who would bear the sins of many. Through the suffering of this servant, God's people would finally come to have peace. Of course, we know now what Isaiah only knew in part – Jesus is the suffering servant. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.

¹⁴ As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations.

¹ Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 58.

Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.
53 Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
² 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.
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.
⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
⁵ 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.
⁶ 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.
⁷ 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.
⁸ 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?
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.
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.
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.
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. (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

When we think of the suffering of Christ, our minds immediately jump to the grisly scene on Good Friday. And so we should! The cross is the CLIMAX of all that Jesus endured for us. But what we often fail to grasp is that Jesus' entire life was marked by suffering. Jesus lived among us, and he experienced all of the brokenness that we face day by day. This morning, we're going to spend our time considering the breadth and the scope of the suffering of the Son.

The Suffering Of The Son

Our first point is actually going to be drawn from the creed rather than the text. In the creed, we declare that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate" because the earliest believers wanted to clearly communicate that:

1. His suffering was historical

I want to begin here because it needs to be said: The things that we are going to unpack this morning really happened in history. That is our claim as Christians. This world is full of fictional stories and allegories that teach good moral lessons, but this isn't one of them. The Apostle Peter wrote:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16 ESV)

Peter walked with Jesus! Peter saw Jesus as he stood on trial before the religious leaders on the night of his arrest. Peter heard the blows. John stood next to Jesus' mother Mary at the foot of the cross. The New Testament authors were eyewitnesses who were faithfully and accurately giving an account of all that they had seen. Just listen to the way that Luke introduces his gospel:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses

and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 ESV)

Now, you may not BELIEVE the claims of the Apostles, but you can't in good faith suggest that they were only ever trying to teach moral lessons. No, they were teaching history. They were giving eyewitness accounts of the Godman who changed the world! This line in the creed serves to capture the historicity of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. As Ben Meyers puts it:

The heart of Christianity is not an idea but a brute fact. Not a theory but a particular human life. Not a general principle but a person with a name: Jesus, who suffered under Pontius Pilate.²

His suffering was not metaphorical – it was historical – and his suffering reached its climax in the city of Jerusalem under the jurisdiction of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The earliest believers made sure that we would never lose sight of that. The second thing we need to understand about the suffering of the Son is that:

2. His suffering was physical

I mentioned off the top that Jesus' suffering was not limited to the cross. He experienced exhaustion and hunger and all of the other physical maladies that we face in our own lives. However, our passage this morning does lead us to consider the crucifixion as the climax of Jesus' physical suffering. Moms and dads, we're going to take the next few moments to unpack some of the terrible affliction that Jesus endured and that will include some graphic details. If you're watching the service with your little ones, proceed with discretion.

During Jesus' mock trial, he was blindfolded and beaten. In Mark 14:65 we read:

And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows. (Mark 14:65 ESV)

² Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 63.

They covered his face and they struck him. Repeatedly. And they spat on him. When Jesus finally stood before Pilate, his face was likely bruised and swollen beyond recognition. Upon hearing the case, even though Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, he sentenced him to death in order to appease the crowds. But before the crucifixion, Pilate ordered that Jesus be flogged.

The Romans used whips that had bones protruding from the leather straps for their flogging. These whips were designed to strip and shred the flesh of those who were being scourged. To receive 40 lashes was considered the equivalent of a death sentence. As Albert Mohler notes:

The Roman methods of flogging would dispense maximum pain to the victim while keeping them from death or shock. The methods of torture intended the victim to feel and experience every ounce of pain rendered.³

Jesus, before his crucifixion, was scourged with 39 lashes.

The guards then fashioned a crown of thorns and forced it onto his swollen head. At this point, Jesus would have been unrecognizable. Almost all of the flesh on his back would have been flayed, and the exposed ligaments would have made it nearly impossible to stand straight. The wounds on his head would have bled profusely dripping down his bruised and disfigured face. He no longer resembled a man. He resembled the suffering servant of Isaiah 52:14:

As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— (Isaiah 52:14 ESV)

I don't recite these details in order to shock you. I recite these details to remind you that you do not serve a King who is oblivious or indifferent to physical suffering. Some of you have lived through chronic pain for as long as you can remember. Some of you will spend the final years of your life slowly and painfully succumbing to disease. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world are experiencing the kind of torment and torture that we see detailed here. And in the pain of physical suffering, there will be moments when you will wonder, "Does God see!? Does God care!? Does God know!?"

³ R. Albert Mohler Jr. *The Apostle's Creed - Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019), 65.

Christian, God does see. And He does care. And He does know. Jesus willingly suffered. He experienced physical agony. He entered into the horror so as to bring you out and deliver you into glory! Your King has gone before you. He has paved the way. He is seated on his throne right now watching as you run this last leg of the race. And He will be there to celebrate with you at the finish line.

And his suffering was more than physical.

3. His suffering was emotional

In verses 3-4 we read:

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.
⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:3-4 ESV)

Not only did Jesus bear your sin, Christian, but he also bore your grief. He exposed himself to the sorrow of this broken world.

He stood and wept with Mary and Martha as they stared hopelessly at the tomb of their brother.

He walked into Jerusalem and he felt the discouragement of the disbelief all around him. He wept as he considered the eternal fate that awaited the people of Jerusalem – the people whom he loved deeply.

Jesus' life was filled with rejection. Before his death, all accounts suggest that his own brothers thought he was crazy. In Nazareth, his hometown, the crowd tried to throw him off of a cliff! He opened up his heart and shared of his very soul with his twelve disciples and yet one of them, Judas, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus wasn't oblivious to the cost when he said:

And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (Matthew 10:36 ESV)

It was from personal experience that he said those words! The darkness hates the light! If you are going to walk in the light – if you are going to live as a follower of Jesus Christ – then you will experience rejection, and grief, and loss, and persecution. You are following in the footsteps of the suffering servant – the man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief. Therefore, Jesus warned:

‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. (John 15:20b ESV)

We serve and follow in the footsteps of a King who understands rejection. We worship a God who knows what it feels like to stand next to the grave of a friend surrounded by deep and sorrowful grief. We cast our burdens on the One who cried his own tears over the unbelief of his loved ones. Our mediator is able to understand our emotional suffering because he experienced it firsthand.

However, unlike us:

4. His suffering was innocent

In verse 9, we read:

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. (Isaiah 53:9 ESV)

Not a single one of us is a truly innocent sufferer.

I want to make sure that you hear this the right way, so please listen to me carefully: Suffering exists because sin exists. Death and disease and broken relationships only exist because of sin. When Adam and Eve rejected God's reign and rule in the garden, they brought the virus of sin into the world and we all feel its effects. And, to an extent, we all perpetuate that virus because the Bible says that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all in varying degrees a part of the problem. We contributed to this broken mess.

Now, listen very closely: I am NOT saying that your particular illness is the direct result of your particular sin. The Bible is clear that we don't have the ability to draw those kinds of lines and we really hurt other people when we try to connect those dots. But what I AM saying is that your illness IS the direct result of sin in general. We have all contributed to the sin that has so ruined our world and, as a result, in varying degrees, we all feel the painful sting of the curse.

That is true of us. But it is not true of Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life. He did not contribute any sin to this mess. He was innocent and spotless and righteous. The physical suffering that he experienced and the emotional suffering that he experienced and all of the brokenness that caused him to weep – NONE of it was the result of his sin. He suffered because of OUR sin.

A few years ago, on Christmas Eve, my brother called my dad in a panic. He and a bunch of young coworkers shared a house, and the septic tank at the house was full. Now, they didn't know the house was on septic and they had accused my brother of clogging the plumbing. They were angry, and he had to go to work, so he called my dad. Dad drove thirty minutes to the house on Christmas Eve – just a few hours before he would be leading the Christmas Eve service at the church – and he walked into the house with my brother's angry roommates.

He went down into the gross, sewage-filled basement and used a snake to try to unclog whatever had led to the mess. Meanwhile, one of young, angry roommates decided to take a shower knowing full well that would cause more sewage to rise up into the basement. Finally, realizing that the house was on septic, my dad called in a favor from his friend and that friend left his Christmas Eve plans and emptied their tank. Then, my dad mopped up the basement, packed up his tools and went to leave the house, as one of the young men grumbled, "You should've just called that guy in the first place." Then he washed up and led the Christmas Eve service.

Now, my dad is not Jesus, but I think that story might be a useful way of illustrating what we see here. Jesus did not cause this mess! He made this world to be glorious, but then in our arrogance and rebellion WE ruined it. At that point, he could have turned a blind eye. He could have said, "that's not my problem." He had every right to do that! But instead, Jesus entered into our mess. He waded into our filth. He suffered under the sting of the curse. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law **by becoming a curse for us** (Galatians 3:13a ESV)

Jesus – the only innocent man who has ever lived – suffered under the curse of sin and he soaked it all up into himself and then he took it with him to the cross where it could finally be done away with once and for all. As Albert Mohler writes:

His innocence accomplished the effectual power of the gospel’s ability to save sinners. There would be no power in the gospel if not for the perfect life and total innocence of Jesus as he stood before the slaughter.⁴

That leads us to the final thing that we need to see as we consider the suffering of the Son:

5. His suffering was purposeful

Look with me at verses 5-6:

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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. (Isaiah 53:5-6 ESV)

Jesus suffered with a purpose. The hunger and the weakness and the exhaustion and the betrayal and the beatings and the accusations and the scourging and the insults and the thorns and the rejection and the cross were not unexpected results of Jesus’ descent to earth. They were the reason that he came! He came to suffer! He came to absorb the curse of our sin and to satisfy our debt in his suffering and death. This was the plan at the very beginning. As we read in verse 10:

¹⁰ Yet it was **the will of the Lord** to crush him; (Isaiah 53:10a ESV)

⁴ R. Albert Mohler Jr. *The Apostle’s Creed - Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019), 61.

It's hard for us to wrap our minds around a plan that includes so much suffering. We like easy plans. Painless plans. But there is no painless way to deal with sin.

The problem of sin goes deeper than we will ever understand. Imagine for a moment that you had the ability to follow the effect of every one of your sins all the way to their conclusion. Every careless word. Every angry outburst. Every prideful decision. Imagine you could see all of the people that your sin impacted; all the wounds that your sin left in its wake.

Sin is not a simple problem. It runs deep. It hurts profoundly. As Martyn Lloyd Jones writes:

Every unhappiness in the human heart at this minute is due to sin.⁵

Sin ruins EVERYTHING! Ultimately, the thing that should horrify us the most is the way that our sin offends God. Sin, at its core, is a rejection of His goodness. Every lie, every lustful glance, every angry outburst, every prideful thought is a reflection of a deeply held belief that God is not good. Sin is the overflow of the heart that desires to dethrone God. R.C. Sproule refers to it as cosmic treason⁶. And this cosmic treason – this rebellion that each and every one of us has perpetuated – is the reason why suffering exists in this world.

But God had a plan to deal with our sin. It was a costly plan. It was a plan that looked like it was bound to fail. The innocent Son of God was born of a virgin. He lived a perfectly obedient life in the midst of suffering and then he died in our place all while the very people he came to save mocked and derided him. They lifted his broken, unrecognizable body off of the cross and laid it in a tomb. But, wonder of all wonders, three days later, the stone was rolled away and the triumphant King of Kings stepped out into the blazing sun! The power of the curse was broken! The prison of death had been unlocked! The wrath of God had been satisfied! The plan was a success! Suffering gave way to glory! Herbert M. Wolf says it so well:

What seemed like a pitiful display of weakness turned out to be a victory of massive proportions.⁷

⁵ Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 129.

⁶ R.C. Sproule, *The Holiness of God*, (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2010), 140.

⁷ Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 219.

Amen.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, over the coming weeks we are going to be unpacking the climax of Jesus' suffering – the crucifixion – and all that it means for our salvation. This morning, however, I want to conclude with a reflection on the suffering that took place before the cross. As Ben Meyers wrote:

Already among the earliest Christians it had become customary to sum up Jesus' whole life under one word: "suffering."⁸

We rarely contemplate this aspect of Jesus' life. But we should. The author to the Hebrews wrote:

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (Hebrews 5:8 ESV)

Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience, but that wouldn't be all that impressive had he lived a life of ease, would it? Without suffering, what IS obedience? Obedience is tested in the face of hardship.

When the devil tempted Jesus to turn the stones into bread in the wilderness, Jesus was suffering through real hunger. His stomach was cramping, and he was weak, and he genuinely DESIRED food. But his desire to alleviate his suffering did not trump his desire to obey the Father.

Think of all the times that we read about Jesus waking up before the sunrise to withdraw by himself to pray. He had been walking for miles the day before. He had just slept on the ground. Jesus said, "foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man had no place to lay his head." And yet, he rose before the sunrise and he carried his sleepy, sore body to a secluded place, and he surrendered his day and his plans to his Father.

⁸ Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 58.

Jesus was not a robot. He was truly man. Therefore, he truly suffered. Weakness, frailty, exhaustion, hunger, betrayal, rejection, inconvenience – his perfect obedience was learned and displayed in the school of affliction.

Do you understand why this doctrine matters? Do you understand why the disciples pointed back to the suffering of Christ as our example and why the earliest Christians summarized his life in this way? He suffered as we suffer, and yet his obedience never wavered.

This doctrine matters when your chronic headache forces you back into bed and you wonder, “How can I worship God here, in my pain?” It matters when you’re staring at your Bible after your baby kept you awake all night and you’re wondering, “How can I spend meaningful time with the Lord when I’m so exhausted?” It matters when your spouse has disappointed you again and you’re asking, “Do I still need to be faithful when I’m treated this poorly?”

Anyone can obey when the sun is shining, and the marriage is strong, and the body is healthy, and the restrictions are lifted, and the world is all as it should be. But you’ve been called to a costly obedience. You’ve been called to take up your cross and to walk the narrow, lonely, painful road – the road marked with suffering. And from time to time, that road is going to feel absolutely impossible. But, by the grace of God, you will look to the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate. And you will hear the voice of the Apostle Peter:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21 ESV)

This is our King. This is our calling. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.