

GOOD FRIDAY: BEAUTY FROM ASHES

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Isaiah 53-54

Welcome church. We are providing this resource to you to participate in the meaning of Good Friday this year. Doxa, thank you for being here. It's important that you're here. I'm grateful for you, and I love you. And we are also welcoming, Soma Federal Way as they join us online this evening as well. It's good to have some of our out-of-town relatives join us for this family time together. Let me explain what's about to happen here. We, as a church body, are going to walk through a passage of scripture in Isaiah 52 and 53 together, and you're going to hear the scriptures read, and then I will share briefly observations from the text. I'll be sharing nine things we can reflect on as we think on the execution of Jesus Christ. And I'm praying that one or two of these are gonna land with each of you, stir something up in you and invite you to experience this Good Friday.

I want to say up front that this experience is meant for those old enough to appropriately comprehend the graphic nature in which our savior was killed as it happened. So parents please use discretion. And even for you adults, you're going to likely feel an uneasiness, a desire to look away. And I want us to hang in there together, not just to relive this horrific moment in our history of our faith, but to think on how Christ is at work in us right now. Not just despite, but especially in all of the madness and loss and change of this last year. So open your Bibles to Isaiah 52, turn the lights off or down where you are, if you're able. Light three candles and take a moment of silence to quiet your mind and your heart as we begin.

"Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you -- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind."

One of the beautiful aspects of God's word is how certain passages can carry double meanings. It actually happens a lot in the Old Testament. Now, Isaiah is written about 700 years before Christ walks the earth. And here in chapter 52, verse 13, the Holy Spirit leading the author uses this tool of double meaning when he says that this promised servant shall be high and lifted up. Now, the Jews would immediately think of earlier in this same book, back in chapter six, where high and lifted up meant to the reader, a triumphant ruler over all things. But we in 2021, post crucifixion, think of Jesus hoisted into the air upon the greatest torture device the world has seen, an instrument of death for criminals, the Roman cross. So, which is it? Well, it's both. He

is both dying like a criminal and he is triumphantly ruling, even though it may not appear that way in this moment. It's hard for us to think about what has to happen to a human body to be unrecognizable, not just to being Jesus, the man that they have all seen speaking and preaching and healing and eating around town. But that this verse says he began to not even look human anymore. He was beyond human semblance. What kind of violence happens to make a person unfamiliar to their closest loved ones and seething enemies? Even today in places where executions still happen, there is most often consideration for the speed with which the death happens. But in ancient Rome, they fully intended to draw out the torturous pain of it.

Not only embarrassing the subject in public beatings and shameful nakedness, but in manipulating and capitalizing on the very nature and design of the human body. Listen to this description of crucifixion from a physiologist named Jeremy Ward at Kings College in London. He says, "Someone nailed to a crucifix with their arms stretched out on either side, could expect to live for no more than 24 hours. Seven inch nails would be driven through the wrists so that the bones there could support the body's weight. The nail would sever the median nerve causing immense pain and paralyzing the hands. The feet were nailed to the upright part of the crucifix with knees bent at around 45 degrees. If things were taking too long, executioners would often break the legs of their victims with clubs or hammers to give them no chance of using their thigh muscles as support. Once the legs gave out, the weight would be transferred to the arms, gradually dragging the shoulders from their sockets.

Then the elbows and the wrists would follow a few minutes later. By now, the arms would be six or seven inches longer than they were before. The victim would have no choice but to bear his weight on his chest. He would immediately have trouble breathing as the weight caused the rib cage to lift up and force him into a perpetual state of inhalation. The resultant lack of oxygen in the blood would cause damage to the tissues and blood vessels, including the lungs and the sac around the heart. All of this ends in a drawn out suffocation."

It's unsettling to hear all that. And Jesus takes on the flesh and experiences all of this the way you or I would. And he does it not to cleanse himself from any spiritual grit and grind, but to cleanse you and I. He is triumphant, but he is also the suffering servant. Christ dies for you at great cost to himself.

"So shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him."

There has never been a world ruler, political head of state, king or queen, emperor or dictator, priest or pastor that has ever escaped God's purview. And while we cannot fully grasp the many reasons why, it is plain to see that God in his perfect love and wisdom uses suffering as an instrument of redemption, of deconstructing the many idols in our lives. And that even his innocent son endured great suffering so that his power could be put on display for the world. And the power in the death of Christ is tied to him being fully man and fully God, because it's in his humanness, him becoming like you and I, that he becomes a fitting substitute for another, but it's in his Godness that he is able to be a worthy substitute for all that call on him. That is remarkable power. We see his unmatched power in act one of God's narrative in the creation story. In act two, we see him take on the only enemy of mankind with undefeated record -

death itself. And we look forward to act three when he returns again, when his power will shine like a beacon of light burning so brightly that the very ground beneath our feet and every ounce of our being is purified and made new. Christ dies for us in power.

"For that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand."

One of the recurring themes throughout the gospels is the utter confusion in the religious community around where Jesus gets his wisdom. His incredible ability to say and do the right things in the right way and the right time. They know he came from a small blue collar town. They know he's hung around the temple here and there, but nobody can figure out why he's the smartest guy in every room. And it wasn't from a fancy education, though he certainly spent time around the juggernauts of theology in that time. It was because his wisdom was a direct by-product of his deep abiding relationship with the spirit. This is why he won every debate. This is why he knew how to pierce a stranger's heart with one compassionate sentence. In fact, in Luke 2, one of the only accounts we have of Christ as a child, it specifically calls this out.

It says, "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom." And this prophecy in Isaiah points forward to the one who would come embodying and living in the wisdom of God. Paul in I Corinthians 1 calls Christ the wisdom of God. Christ acts and responds in this wisdom. Sometimes peacefully, sometimes forcefully, but always with wisdom. The plan of the Father, the plan that Christ willingly embraces and takes to completion in the heavenly realms, is one of wisdom, one that ransoms us in the right way at the right time. Christ knows all and sees all. Christ dies for you in wisdom.

"He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men."

Leading up to his crucifixion. Christ was abandoned by the crowds, by neighbors, by friends, even his closest friends. Those that promised to remain by his side, his varsity team, the inner three, they fall asleep on him in the garden, they lie to complete strangers about knowing him, and they physically distance themselves from him as things escalate before Pontius Pilate. Christ was unwanted, rejected by men. Some of you this year have felt abandoned by your employer, by your friends, your family, your community. When things got hard, though, we were all trying our best, there was deep loss and loneliness, and you felt unwanted. And Christ enters into those moments with compassion, knowing deeply what it is to be unwanted. Many of us in moments over this last year have looked a lot like Peter in Luke 22, where the woman around the fire says, "You're one of them, aren't you?" Meaning a follower of Christ. And he says, "No, I am not." Peter didn't want to be known for associating with him. He didn't want to face the consequences of others knowing where he stood, which to be fair, were potentially great and dangerous. And this last year with all of its cancel culture and politics and raging and hypocrisy, we have all felt the price of being known as a Christian go up. Haven't we? We've all seen others in the name of Christ, do horrific or disturbingly unloving things while waving the

banner of our team flag over their heads. So we find ourselves in a bizarre time where we want to distance ourselves from the false witnesses to the gospel, but also face the truth that being a Christian stirs up things in the people around us. Some of us have actually told the world that they are unwanted by God, by saying nothing of his mercy and grace. Others have told the world that they are unwanted because our actions have told them that.

And many of us have struggled ourselves with feeling that God might love the church corporately, but not us. Hear me, Christian. God likes you. He knows you. He wants you. Listen, Christ doesn't silently meet us in feeling abandoned or unwanted. He also says to us that we are never unwanted by him, our spiritual big brother, or by the Father. That God moves towards us in our mistakes, towards us in our doubts, towards us in our failed attempts to be better Christians. Every failure to be a sexually pure, sober-minded, self-controlled, trusting follower of Christ is seen with crystal clarity and the Father looks at us and says, "Mine." That kind of untethered, unguarded love is what will ultimately move us to a place of courage to share him with others. God wants us church. And yet, Christ dies for you and I unwanted.

"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."

How incredible is it that Christ goes to the cross not resenting the guilty ones he replaces, you and I? Not cursing the ones who make this happen, but instead he looks on us with compassion. That his view of us and willingness to die on that cross is seemingly completely divorced from our lack of gratitude and weakness. Our weakness of discipline, our weakness of choosing others over self, our weakness of trusting our Father in heaven to do once more what he has done a thousand times. Our weakness to regard others as equals instead of threats or a subservient means to our wishes or an object to be lusted after. He sees all of that and with tears in his eyes moves toward us. His arms don't cross, but open to you and I, in deep, compassionate understanding of every hardship and temptation we face every day.

He is one acquainted with grief. He is one who has carried our sorrows, not just watched them from afar on his throne, uninvolved, detached from his kingdom, but instead he walks and talks and eats with those that he formed. He is beaten by humans he formed. He is crucified against wood from a tree he formed. He is held up by nails made from metals he formed. He is involved. He is in the thick of the grit and grime of this world. And his understanding and presence is the reason the scriptures say we have a high priest that sympathizes with our struggles and condition because he walked in it. He faced it himself, and he dies for us with empathy in his heart, not the condemnation we deserve. Christ dies for you in empathy, "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes 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."

What has the last year been if not a significant experiment in shining the light on a fallen world, full of fallen people? A world that wars with each other. A world that dehumanizes others. A world that continually demonstrates a lack of capacity to seek peace or love or justice or wisdom. And here is where the good news of the gospel for those that are being saved, sounds like bad news to a dying world. You and I need rescue. We need it. The world is not going to right itself. And the solution doesn't come from deep inside you and I, it's not coming from you being your true self or living your truth or random acts of kindness, or even doing the best you can to be a good human. Humanity has repeated the same mistake since the beginning. And Christ says that it's because we have a sin problem.

One that starts in us before we even take our first breath. We all reflect God at times, yes, we have our moments of selflessness or mercy, but none of us hold that line for terribly long. You see, the mark on the wall isn't put there by a flawed, imperfect God who gets it right some of the time, but by a perfect God that stands Holy and flawless over all creation. And the flippant and cavalier attitude that many of us talk about the afterlife is a mockery of what Christ has taught and declared us as crucial to understand. We need his rescue. We cannot get out of this mess on our own. Heaven is real. Hell is real. The souls of man are real. And these matters are weighty things that will outlast most of the turmoil and stresses and complications and victories that we spend our days wrapped up in. Christ did not die to prove he was a good teacher. He did not die to offer us some help from time to time. He did not die to afford you the opportunity to posture or pretend that your life depends on God. He died because we have inherited and participated in the rebellion that makes it necessary for God to intervene and smash death and sin with his power and might. This passage says we have turned every one to his own way. He needed to step in because we humans, including you and I, have done our part in burning the bridge between God and man. And Christ is the only one who rebuilds that bridge and asks you and I to cross it, taking each step by faith. Christ dies for us out of necessity.

"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." You know, as Christians we normalize the crucifixion, but the unfathomable part for me will always be that Christ takes every step up the hill at Golgotha of his own volition. The beauty of Christ's obedience was that he chose to be captured, chose to be beaten, chose to be tortured, chose to be publicly mocked and embarrassed. He chose to enter history in a time when executions would be carried out in horrifying ways. And in a way that we can probably more fully appreciate than is fair to be expected of the people on that hillside, he restrains himself. He stays his hand from reaching for indomitable power, power available to him by choice. Now we know as 21st century believers with seven translations of our Bibles in our homes, that Christ as an eternal being, forever existing member of the Trinity, could have done many things in those final hours to display his power.

He could have melted every Roman soldier into a pile of dust. He could have set them all on fire. He could have with one breath, blown them all out to see in their armor. And yet, like a lamb, an unimpressive non-threatening weak animal, an animal that is clearly more prey than

predator, he willingly chooses to be led through the events of the crucifixion. This is the ultimate laying down of rights. And not only does he exercise ultimate restraint and not resist in his body, he remained silent with his words. And it's because he had said everything he came to say. He had accomplished what he needed to before his death. And he was about to accomplish the pinnacle of his work on earth. The choice to die for us was not easy. It's why he cries out in the garden, "If there's any other way."

And yet, when things got hard, he kept going. No one was going to kill him until he was ready. We see in the gospels a few times that the religious leaders think they have him pinned down theologically and even physically. And what does Jesus do? He escapes into the crowd. Why? Because he was afraid? Because he was a coward? No. It's because his time had not yet come. And he decides when he dies. He decides how things transpire. No one forced Christ to die for you. He dies for you as his greatest display of unrelenting obedience to the Father and love for you. And then even in the midst of death itself, that God is working his good plan and accomplishing what he desires, Christ dies for you in willing obedience.

"And they made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."

Even though Isaiah is written 700 years before Christ is born a human, it accurately describes the death of an innocent one. What a bizarre thing to say. And yet it comes true in the passion. Christ offended many. He sparred with many influential and powerful leaders. He broke religious laws that man created, but never once did he sin. That is, he never broke God's commandments or lived a day of his life unyielded to the will of the father. And it's actually remarkable that there's no record of Jesus sinning. I mean, he had a whole team of people fully dedicated to framing, trapping, and catching him in the act. And he never deviated from what the father asked of him. His innocence is an essential ingredient in his substituting work on the cross. The holiness that we receive, the righteousness that is credited to us, according to Romans 4, comes from our faith in Christ's ability to resist every temptation and live a perfect life. Not only not doing wrong or unholy things, but doing Holy things for Holy reasons. And he never failed once. A perfect record. And that same perfect record is credited to you and I, when we call on him to save us. Christ dies for us innocently.

"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."

In Genesis 3 we see the Proto-evangelium or first gospel, when God says to the serpent, "He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." This was the first time we see recorded in the Bible, God make a promise to his people. A promise that the child of Adam down the line would be the one to crush Satan's head, which is not an injury you recover from, there is no rehab for that. And it's the first of just under 7,500 promises that God makes to us, the children of God. I want to be transparent with you, and this is clear and known to every Christian. If you've been a Christian for a week, you know that this is true. This is what I know about God's

promises. They always come to pass. They often come to pass in ways or timing that I don't expect.

And at times it is hard to find my hope in them. You see we've grown suspicious. Some of us were born that way. Some of us turned out that way. Most of us have had significant ways others have failed us and we've been let down in traumatic ways, some of which we recognize those effects, and I feel that a lot of it, we honestly miss, we're completely unaware of how it shapes us. But we've put ourselves out there and we've been rejected. We've opened ourselves up and given others access and they've abused or mishandled that access. And that has left us with a suspicious posture towards everyone and everything, including the only one who has a perfect record. I know we distrust governments and institutions and leaders and even each other, but hear me church, Christ is different because of all the 7,500 promises God makes, the ones that are left unchecked on that list they are on their way. They are bearing down on us right now at breakneck speed and nothing will stop them. No amount of money or education or social reform or family values or politics or Bible study or mediocre religious performance will change those promises one ounce. Church, we are the transgressors in this passage. You were there in a sense when Christ was lifted up on that cross. We have inherited and participated in the rebellion against the ruler of everything we touch and see. We are sober that our rebellion and sins have added to the heap of what is placed on his shoulders. And he has promised to make that right. Isaiah says, "He poured out his soul to death." Why? Because God keeps his promises and we can trust him. We trust him because his promises are true. We trust him because we have no other rescue. We trust him because he was willing to die for us. And we trust him because of what's coming Sunday.