

The Saving Power of the Cross

Isaiah 53:1-12

The Roman Empire accomplished some impressive things while it lasted.

It was able to build impressive structures, develop an efficient and durable road system (in fact some roads are still in use today), they made aqueducts to transport water long distances to supply cities with water, and they significantly impacted the world in terms of philosophy and science.

Much of that success, I believe, can be attributed to their military strength.

Most of the territory they ruled was taken by force and they used force to maintain their power.

They did not tolerate rebellion and they maintained fairly strict law enforcement.

There were no massive prisons in the roman world.

Even the biggest ones could not hold very many.

That is because the Romans employed severe corporal punishment and capital punishment to enforce their laws.

Execution rather than incarceration was their method for maintaining order in the territories they occupied.

One of the methods they developed for putting people to death is called crucifixion.

It was a cruel form of punishment which could last a substantial period of time.

It was intended to humiliate the one condemned as well as serve as an example for all the on lookers of the consequences of rebelling against Roman law and rule.

According to the website patternsofevidence.com there were somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000 people crucified by the Roman government.

I looked that up because a thought popped into my head early this week as I was thinking about our gathering here this morning.

It was a question. I asked myself, “Can I name ten other people in the history of the world that were crucified?”

Out of all those people I couldn’t come up with ten names.

Anybody else?

You know I couldn’t come up with five names. I thought of two names, but it turned out one of them probably didn’t die by crucifixion.

In the end I could only come up with one name, the name of Jesus Christ.

How many of you are like me and the only crucified person you can name is Jesus?

The fact that as many as 150000 died in this way and we can't even come up with ten names, or five names, or two names tells me that dying in this way meant dying and being quickly forgotten.

Which for me raises a really important question. Why do we remember the name Jesus Christ?

It is more than just remember. No other name has changed the world as much as the name Jesus.

What is it about this man crucified by the Romans that is so different?

[I would suggest to you this morning that what makes the cross of Jesus different from all the others is that in the cross of Christ there is the power of God for the salvation of sinners. That is where we want to turn our attention this morning and to do that we are going to go to the prophet **Isaiah 53:1-12**. Just the fact that these verses were written hundreds of years before the events actually took place points us to the power of God, but not everyone sees it. That was true the day Jesus died and sadly it is true still today. Isaiah shows us why in this passage, he shows us that...]

Point #1 – Human wisdom fails to see the saving power of the cross. (Verses 1-4)

If we look upon Jesus and particularly His suffering and death at only a surface level then we will never truly appreciate what happened on that day.

Verse 1 begins with a couple of questions.

Who has believed God's word and who can see the power of God?

The answer, I believe, is the same to both questions.

The one who believes and can see is the one who understands the work of the Servant of the LORD described in this passage.

To do that we need to see deeper than the surface appearance of things.

Look how Jesus is described in the first half of verse 2. (**Verse 2a**)

'Young plant' translates a word that suggests a plant coming up out of a stump of a cut down tree.

Which fits with the parallel image of a root coming out of 'dry ground'.

The idea is that Jesus coming into the world and growing up before God the Father is bringing life to a lifeless place.

That is what is really going on, but if people only saw Him at a surface level this is what they would see (Verse 2b)

This likely describes Jesus' normal appearance as a man.

He was likely of average height and average appearance.

In fact, in Mark 6 we read that while some were amazed at His teaching others, those who knew Him before He began His teaching ministry were offended by Him because they thought Him ordinary.

Isaiah continues that thought in **Verses 3-4** describing how human wisdom viewed the cross.

By the time Jesus is nailed to the cross He is a mess physically.

He had suffered the Roman whip which was design to tear open the skin, blood would be running down His face from the crown of thorns, and He likely was severely bruised as well.

Human wisdom would see no power there, it would see weakness worthy of mockery and that is what happened.

There were those, like the religious leaders, who thought Jesus was getting what He deserved at the hand of God.

They were right to think that He was "stricken" and "smitten by God", but were wrong to think that He was getting what He deserved.

That is what happens when we only see the outward appearance of the cross, we won't be able to see what is really going on.

[That is still true today. Many people see Jesus as just an ordinary man. Sure He may have taught some interesting things and inspired a few people here and there, but at the end of the day He is just another guy who died at the hands of the Romans. If that is true though, why did His name change the world? How did an average looking guy from the middle of nowhere who died on a cross like hundreds of thousands forgotten people make such an incomparable impact? The answer is that there is more going on than what human wisdom can see. Isaiah shows us what is really going on here. He shows us that...]

Point #2 – Jesus standing in our place is the saving power of the cross. (Verses 5-8)

The whole reason God can offer us forgiveness and still remain just and holy is that Christ endured what we deserve.

Verses 5-6 make this incredibly clear.

'Pierced', nails driven through His hands and feet, 'for our transgressions'.

'Crushed', suffered the full weight of punishment, 'for our iniquity' that is our guilt.

The punishment that Jesus suffers is the punishment that we deserve.

Do you see what it brings the believer in verse 5? It says that 'chastisement' that is the punishment brought us peace.

His wounds are the means of our healing.

In other words Jesus is punished in our place.
 If He doesn't stand in our place we can't be forgiven.

The LORD cannot ignore the fact that we have ALL gone astray like sheep.

The idea of that illustration is that we have all said "no" to God's goodness and provision and decided to do our own thing instead.

Do you know what happens to a sheep that wanders away from its shepherd?
 Unless the shepherd comes to the rescue, the sheep usually end up losing its life.

The Bible is really clear on this point, when we wander off, when we go our own way, when we break God's laws it leads to our destruction.

Now if God just said, "It doesn't matter that you broke my laws don't worry about it I won't hold it against you."

What would He be doing?

He would be denying His own goodness and He would be denying His own justice.
 That is impossible for Him to do.

So if He is going to forgive us and remain just someone has to act as a substitute for us.

That is what Jesus is doing on the cross.

He does that willingly (**Verse 7**).

The image of a lamb here keeps the idea of a sacrifice for transgression (law breaking) and iniquity (guilt) front and center.

In the face of His oppression and affliction Jesus, the prophet says, remains silent like a sheep before its shearers.

We can see that fulfilled as Jesus stands before His accusers. They say all kinds of things about Him and He says very little in response.

If He had wanted to, He could have defended Himself.

If He had wanted to He could have spoken a command to thousands of angels in heaven to deliver Him from the hands of evil men.

If He wanted to He could have spoken a word and put them all into complete submission and He would have been freed.

In His silence He is submitting Himself to what would come which **verse 8** points us to.

That is likely a rhetorical question.

Did anyone consider that He suffered and died to the transgressions of God's people?

No, but that is exactly what happened.

That is the power of the cross brothers and sisters.

That Jesus takes upon Himself the consequence of all our disobedience and fully satisfies the wrath of God on our behalf.

Think about how incredibly amazing that is!

These verses make it pretty clear that Jesus suffers and dies for the guilt and lawbreaking of all His people.

He endures the fullness of what we deserve for all eternity in hell in the span of about six hours on the cross.

He does this not just for one person or even a few people, but for everyone who believes (a great multitude from every tribe tongue and nation).

That is far beyond what I can even begin to wrap my mind around.

That is the power of God at work through Jesus standing in our place.

[One of the things that is very hard about the cross is to look upon it and see the truth that this is what we deserved. We deserve God's wrath poured out in full. Every time we break God's laws in the way we act, in the words we speak, in our thoughts, or in our feelings we are showing contempt for the infinite perfections of the LORD. It is only by seeing that reality that we can begin to have a sense of how serious our problem is. It is only by seeing that reality that we can begin to appreciate the saving power of the cross. We need someone to stand in our place if we are going to be made right with God, but it can't be just anyone, it has to be Jesus. That is true for a number of reasons one of which Isaiah shows us in last portion of this passage. He shows us that...]

Point #3 – Jesus' perfection makes the saving power of the cross possible. (Verses 9-12)

Because our Saviour pleased God the Father in every single way He can offer His goodness for us and credit His goodness to our account.

Look at what it says about our Saviour in verse 9.

The place of Jesus death was indeed 'among the wicked'.

There were two others crucified with Him that day, one on His right and the other on His left.

Both of them were guilty of crimes and Jesus is treated the same way.

It also says here that 'his grave' was 'with a rich man'.

I agree with commentators who say this is referring to Jesus' body being placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

A man who knew Jesus did not deserve to be crucified.

He laid the LORD's body in a tomb in which no one else had ever been laid.

That is a fitting place for Him because just as He did not deserve to die among the

wicked, He also did not belong among the dead.

Why? Look it says, “He had done no violence and there was no deceit in His mouth.”

Jesus had never done anything wrong in His entire life. (**Verse 10**)

God the Father willed to put the full weight of the guilt of human rebellion on Jesus.

He does that because Jesus’ life is an ‘offering for guilt’ it says here.

Why is it an acceptable offering? Why is God pleased with it?

Because Jesus is perfect. He has no need to pay for Himself which gives Him the ability to pay for us.

Who are the ‘offspring’ referred to in this verse? It is those who are given life through His death.

Why will God ‘prolong his days’ because of His innocence the LORD will not allow death to keep hold of Him.

Look with me at **verses 11-12**.

Out of the horror of the cross Jesus will ‘see and be satisfied’.

Hebrews 12:2 says, “for the joy set before Him [Jesus] endured the cross.”

What joy is there in the cross? The joy of full obedience for the purpose of displaying the fullness of God’s justice and the fullness of God’s love.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit never look back on the cross with regret.

Each Person in the Being of God looks with complete satisfaction at what was accomplished.

And what is the outcome for us? Through knowing ‘the righteous one’ He shall ‘make many to be accounted righteous’.

You see there are two exchanges that happen because of the saving power of the cross.

As Isaiah makes clear, one exchange is that the guilt and punishment that we deserve on account of our failures gets placed upon Jesus.

The second exchange that takes place is that His goodness/righteousness/perfection gets placed upon us.

This is what it means in Galatians 3:27 where it says that believers have been ‘clothed...with Christ.’

Because of Jesus’ perfection He can make ‘intercession for the transgressor’ meaning He can act on behalf of the guilty before the throne of God and have us declared innocent.

That is what makes the saving power of the cross possible, if Jesus were a lawbreaker like us then He could not stand in our place to help us.

But we know He can help us because God clearly shows that He died not for Himself but for others through the power of His resurrection.

That is why Jesus name does not fade into history with the many thousands of others who died at the hands of the Romans by crucifixion.

Because something more happened that day then what the human eye can see.

If we just look at the surface picture we will just see an ordinary man dying like many others.

But if we, by God's grace can see the reality of what happens on the cross we will see Jesus standing in our place.

We will see the perfection of His humanity and the power and of His Divinity at work to make us right with God and give us the hope of eternal life.

That is the saving power of the cross.

Can you see that this morning? Are you trusting in that today?

That is the only way to have the saving power of the cross applied to your life.

You can either look to the cross and be saved or you can stay in your sin and face God's wrath on your own.

No one else has done what Jesus has on our behalf and no one else can accomplish what Jesus has on our behalf.

If you want to be right with the LORD if you want to have the sure hope of eternal life there is only one place to turn and that is to the saving power of the cross.