

INITIATION INTO ISAIAH

by

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CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

THEME:

The substitutionary death of Christ upon the cross for sinners.

REMARKS:

In chapter 1 we presented a message to introduce the first section of Isaiah—The Government of God, where we saw Jesus upon the throne. We present a message now for this last major division of Isaiah—The Grace of God, here we see Jesus upon the Cross.

A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE CROSS

Those who are acquainted with God's Word realize that the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and the 22nd Psalm give us a more vivid account of the crucifixion of Christ than is found elsewhere in the Bible.

This may be a shock to many who are accustomed to think that the four Gospels alone describe the sad episode of the horrible death of the Son of God.

If you will examine carefully the Gospel account, you will make the discovery that only a few unrelated events connected with the crucifixion are given and that the actual crucifixion is passed over with reverent restraint. The Holy Spirit has drawn the veil of silence over that cross, and none of the lurid details are set forth for the curious mob to gaze and leer upon.

It is said of the brutal crowd who murdered Him, that they sat down and watched Him. You and I are not permitted to join that crowd. Even they did not see all, for God placed over His Son's agony the mantle of darkness. Some sensational speakers gather to themselves a bit of notoriety by painting, with picturesque speech, the minutest details of what they think took place at the crucifixion of Christ. Art has given us the account of His death in ghastly reality. You and I will probably never know, even in eternity, the extent of His suffering.

None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed thro'
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

Very likely God did not want us to become familiar with that which we need not know, he did not wish us to treat as commonplace that which is so sacred. We should remind ourselves constantly of the danger of becoming familiar with holy things. **“Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.”**

Isaiah, 700 years before Christ was born, lets us see something of His suffering that we will not find anywhere else.

Before going further, we must pause a moment to answer the question that someone, even now, is doubtless asking—“How do you know that Isaiah is referring to the death of Christ? Isaiah wrote 700 years before Christ was born.”

That is just the question that the Ethiopian eunuch raised when Philip hitchhiked a ride from him in the desert. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the 53rd chapter of Isaiah: we are even told the very place in the chapter where he was reading.

Philip answered the question in this fashion.

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”

Christ, in John 12:38, quoted from Isaiah 53 and makes application to Himself. Paul, in Romans 12:16 quotes from this same chapter in connection with the gospel of Christ. Without attempting to enlarge upon this reference, we affirm that Isaiah 53 refers to Christ, and even more than that, it is a photograph of the Cross.

This chapter tells us two things about Christ:

1. **The SUFFERING of the Saviour.** Verses 1-9
2. **The SATISFACTION of the Saviour.** Verses 10-12

You will find that these two belong together—suffering and satisfaction. Suffering always precedes satisfaction. Too many folk are trying to take a short cut to happiness by attempting to avoid all the trying experiences. There is no short route to satisfaction. Even God did not go that way, he could have avoided the cross and accepted the crown. That was Satan’s suggestion.

Suffering comes before satisfaction always. Phraseology bears various expressions: through trial to triumph; sunshine comes after the clouds; light follows darkness; and flowers come after the rain clouds. That seems to be God’s way of doing things. Since it is His method, then it is the very best way. Perhaps you are sitting in the shadows of life today. Trials confront you, problems overwhelm you, the fiery furnace is your present lot, and you have tasted the bitter without the sweet—then let me encourage your heart and fortify your faith by saying that you are on the same pathway that God followed, and that it leads at last to light if you walk with Him.

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5).

Now let us look at: The Suffering of the Saviour.

This chapter opens with the enigmatic inquiry, “**Who hath believed our report?**”

The prophet seems to be registering a complaint because his message is not believed. This which was revealed to him is not received by men. This is always the sad office of the prophet, his message is rejected until it is too late. God’s messengers have not been welcomed with open arms by the world. The prophets have been stoned and the message unheeded. That is true today.

After the last world war, when everyone was talking peace and safety, it was very unpopular even to suggest that there might be another war. No, public opinion then demanded that we sink all the battleships and disarm ourselves, for our leaders told us that the world was safe for democracy. There were a few prophets of God, in that period, standing in the pulpits of the land. They were not pacifists, but they did not care for war either. They declared in unmistakable terms that God’s Word said there would be wars and rumors of war so long as there was sin, unrighteousness, and evil in the world. They stated that war was not a skin disease but a heart disease. When others declared that Christ was a pacifist, they called attention to the fact that He had said that a strong man armed keepeth his palace.

I can recall, as a boy, that the church I attended had just such a minister, he was a faithful servant of Christ, and sought to please God rather than men. But his message was largely rejected, and he was not popular with the crowd. Time has now proven that he was right, and current events demonstrate that he was a friend of this nation and not an enemy, he was a prophet of God and could say with Isaiah, “**Who has believed our report?**” There are a few prophetic voices lifted right now in America that are trying to call this nation back to God before it is too late, but the crowd is rushing headlong after another delusion.

Paul said the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.

From ideas publicly expressed, we are given to know that there are many to whom the preaching of the cross is foolishness. To them there is a lot of foolish preaching, for which we offer no apology. God said they would identify the preaching of the cross with foolishness. This message is a challenge to those folk, for there is a reason for their thinking as they do.

God says, “**The natural man receiveth; not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.**” Would that they would give God a chance to talk with them!

It must be remembered that God does not use man’s methods and ways to accomplish things. God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and the foolish things to confound the wise. If we were to call in a specialist in a time of illness, we certainly would not expect him to use the same home remedies normally used by us, his procedure might appear foolish to us, but we would follow it faithfully. Then should we not accord God the same dealing of fairness as the specialist?

There is a very definite reason why men do not believe in God's gospel. Men like to think of God as sitting somewhere in heaven upon some lofty throne. The ancients spoke of the gods whose dwelling was not with mankind. The Greeks placed their deities upon Mt. Olympus and the Romans had Jupiter hurling thunderbolts from the battlements of the clouds. It is foreign to the field of religion that God has come down to this earth among men, and that He suffered upon the shameful cross. That is too much to comprehend. The modern mind calls that defeatism—they do not care for it. A suffering deity is contrary to man's thinking.

There is a peculiar fascination about the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

There we see One suffering as no one else ever suffered. There we behold One in pain as a woman in travail. We are strangely drawn to Him and His cross, he said, **"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me."**

Suffering has a singular attraction. Pain draws us all together. When you and I see some poor creature groaning in misery, and covered with blood, our hearts instinctively go out in sympathy to the unfortunate victim. Somehow we want to help. That is the reason that the Red Cross makes such an appeal to our hearts. Our sympathies are made keen toward those who are war's victims, the victims of 20th century civilized barbarism. Pain places all of us on the same plane. It is a common bond uniting all the frail children of suffering humanity.

Look with me upon the strange sufferings of the Son of God. Let Him draw our cold hearts into the warmth of His sacrifice and the radiance of His love.

Isaiah enlarges upon his first question by asking further, **"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"** "Bared arm" means, I say it reverently, the sleeve rolled up, symbolic of a tremendous undertaking. When God created the heavens and the earth, it is suggested that it is merely His finger work.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work (finger work).

Dr. Talmage used to say that God created the physical universe and did not even half try. When God created the heavens and the earth, it was without effort, he merely "spoke" them into existence. But when God redeemed man, it required His "bared arm," for salvation was His greatest undertaking. One of the objections offered to God's salvation is that it is free. If by that is meant that for man it is free, then that is correct. Man can pay nothing, nor does he have anything to offer for salvation. The reason that it is free for man is because it cost God everything, he gave His Son to die upon the cross.

Redemption is an infinite task that only God could perform. Salvation is free, but it is not cheap.

Now we have brought before us the person of Christ. We are told something of His origin on the human side:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him (Isaiah 53:2).

Christ was a root out of a dry ground. At the time of the birth of Christ, the family of David had been cut off from the kingship. They were no longer princes; they were peasants. The nation Israel was under the iron heel of Rome. The Roman Empire produced no great civilization; they merely were good imitators of great civilizations. There was mediocre achievement and pseudo-culture. The moral foundation was gone. A virile manhood and a virtuous womanhood were supplanted by a debauched and pleasure loving citizenry.

The religion of Israel had gone to seed.

They merely performed an empty ritual and the heart remained cold and indifferent. Into such a situation Christ came, he came from a noble family that was cut off, from a nation that had become a vassal to Rome, in a day and age that was decadent. The loveliest flower of humanity came from the driest spot and period of the world's history. It was humanly impossible for His day and generation to produce Him, but He came nevertheless, for He came forth from God. The prophet focuses our attention immediately upon His suffering and death upon the cross: He hath no form or majesty; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. (Isaiah 53:2).

Some have drawn the inference from this statement that Christ was unattractive and misshapen in some way. Some even dare to suggest that He was repulsive in His personal appearance. That cannot be true, for He was the perfect man. The Gospels do not countenance nor lend support to any such viewpoint. It was on the cross that this declaration of Him became true in a very real way, his suffering was so intense that He became drawn and misshapen. That cross was not a very pretty thing; it was absolutely repulsive to view. Men have fashioned crosses that look very attractive, but they do not represent His cross, his cross was not good to look upon; His suffering was unspeakable; His death was horrible, he endured what no other man endured, he did not even look human after the ordeal of the cross, he was a mass of unsightly flesh.

Naturally, we are eager to learn why His death was different and horrible. What is the meaning of the depths of His suffering? Now note very carefully the answer, **“smitten of God and afflicted.”**

The prophet was so afraid that you and I would miss that, that he mentioned it three times: **“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him.” “He hath put him to grief.”** Consternation fills our souls when we recognize that it was God who treated the perfect man in such terrible fashion.

Candidly, we do not understand it and we are led to inquire why God should treat Him in this manner. What had He done to merit such treatment? Look for a moment again at that cross. Christ was on the cross six hours, hanging between heaven and earth from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon.

In the first three hours man did his worst, he heaped ridicule and insult upon Him, spat upon Him, nailed Him without mercy to the cruel cross, and then sat down to watch Him die. At twelve o'clock noon, after He had hung there for three hours in agony. God drew a veil over the sun and darkness covered that scene, shutting out from human eye the transaction between the Father and the Son. For Christ became the sacrifice for the sin of the world. God made His soul an offering for sin, and He was treated as sin, for we are told that He was made sin for us who knew no sin.

If you want to know if God hates sin, look at the cross. If you want to know if God will punish sin, look at the Darling of His heart enduring the tortures of its penalty. By what vain conceit can you and I hope to escape if we neglect so great salvation? That cross became an altar where we behold the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, he was dying for somebody else; He was dying for you and me. Listen to the prophet:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53: 5, 6).

He was merely taking your place and mine, he had done nothing amiss, he was holy, harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners, he was a substitute that the love of God provided for you and me so that He might save us.

Surely our hearts go out in sympathy to Him as He expires there upon the tree. Certainly we are not unmoved at such pain and suffering. We would be cold blooded indeed if there were no responsive chord in our hearts. When Clovis, the leader of the Franks, was told about the crucifixion of Christ, he leaped to his feet, drew his sword and exclaimed, "If I had only been there with my Franks." Yet, my friend, Christ does not want your sympathy—He did not die to win that.

Someone may be thinking that He died a martyr's death, He did not die a martyr's death, for He did not espouse a lost cause! He did not die as martyrs who in their death sang praises of joy and confessed that Christ was standing by them, he did not die like that, for He was forsaken of God. **"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"** His death was different—He died alone.

Someone else may feel like saying what a wonderful influence the death of Christ should exercise upon our lives. As we contemplate His life and death, most assuredly we ought to be persuaded to turn from sin, however, that has not been the experience of men. That view will not satisfy as an explanation of some other statements in this chapter. **"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

None of these will suffice to explain His death, for He is the Lamb of God that taketh away sin, he died for you and me—He took our place.

The Satisfaction of the Saviour

In this connection there is another phrase here that you hear quoted so often, and generally in a wrong sense, he is identified as **“a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”**

The inference is drawn that Christ was a very unhappy man while here upon earth, and to fortify this position, a few isolated incidents are quoted where it says that He wept. Let me correct that if I can. Read on in Isaiah 53 and you will find this, **“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.”** It was our sorrow and grief that He bore; He was supremely happy in His mission here upon earth, for it is said of Him, **“For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross.”**

Joyfully He took our place upon the cross, he made that cross an altar on which was offered a satisfactory payment for the penalty of your sins and mine. Willingly He died there, for it is further stated that, **“as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”**

Perhaps you are saying just now to yourself. “Preacher, that does not make sense to me. I do not believe that nor do I care for that sort of religion. I do not want God to make a sacrifice for me. I did not ask Him to do it.”

It is true, my friend, that you did not ask Him to do it, but let me ask you a very plain and fair question. I am sure that you will agree that man has got this world into a very sad predicament today. The wisdom of man has failed to settle the issues of this life, had you ever thought that perhaps man may be wrong about the next life when he dismisses God’s remedy with a snap of the fingers? Vain philosophy and a false science have not solved the problems of daily living. They may be wrong about the Bible.

Now suppose for a moment that God did give His Son to die for you, and He did make such a tremendous sacrifice. Grant that the cross is God’s remedy for the sin of this world and that it is the very best that even God can do.

Suppose, also, that you go on rejecting His proffered and gracious offer of salvation. Do you think that you can reasonably expect God to do anything for you in eternity? If God exhausted His love, his wisdom, and His power in giving Christ to die, what else can He do to save you?

What do you suppose God can do for you when you reject His Son who died for you? He would come again this afternoon and die again if that were needed to save you. It is no light thing to turn down God’s love gift to you.

That does not end the gospel story, my friend. We do not worship a dead Christ but a living one, He not only died; He arose again from the grave in victory; He ascended back into heaven. At this moment He is sitting at God’s right hand, and the prophet says. **“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”**

We have a living and rejoicing Saviour, for His suffering led to satisfaction, he took our hell that we might have His heaven, he is happy, for down through the ages multitudes, yea millions, have come to Him and found sweet release from guilt, pardon for wrongdoing, and healing from the leprosy of sin. Christ said there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, and that number can be multiplied by millions. Think of the joy and satisfaction of Christ today. We have a happy Christ.

You can bring added joy to His heart by accepting the gift of eternal life that He longs to give you, he invites you to the foot of His cross.

May this be your prayer and mine:

Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand—
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land:
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way.
From the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day.

Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One who suffered there for me;
And from my smitten heart with tears two wonders I confess—
The wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.

~ end of chapter 53 ~

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