

## The Sinner's Substitute.

Text: Isa 53:4-6

Suggested Hymns:

66, 71, 170, 292, 54

- 1) The sinner's substitute
- 2) The fatal disease
- 3) A ray of hope
- 4) In our stead
- 5) Redeemed to serve

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 53:4-6, *‘Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> 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.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There is great excitement in Jerusalem. There is wild shouting in the streets. People of all ages and classes are pressing toward the city gate that leads past the market place out to the hill called “The Skull.” A public execution is about to take place.

The prisoners three are trudging along under the burden of their crude crosses, prodded on by the official executioners. Epithets of scorn and derision are cast upon the condemned, especially on the one called Christ. True, there are some emotional outbursts of sobbing and crying on the part of certain women, touched with pity over the impending doom of these men, but — says the Christ — their tears and pity are ill-founded; rather they should be weeping for themselves and the generations they yet would bear.

Had they so soon forgotten that their men-folk had (and perhaps they with them) called down upon themselves and their unborn generations the horrible curse, *“His blood be on us and on our children”?*<sup>1</sup> Oh, *“Daughters of*

*Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*”<sup>2</sup>

Now the procession comes to the crest of Calvary (also called Golgotha). The lust and fervour of the crowd picks up; the hecklers shriek with frenzied glee as the Christ is nailed to the accursed tree. Fury, hatred, and bitterness mount to an almost indescribable peak until Almighty God throws a blanket of darkness over the world for three hours and thus somewhat abates the storm of human emotions.

But what is all this? Why this outrageous execution of an innocent man? Is this all a fable? A fairy tale? A mere bit of fiction drawn out of the pages of ancient history? No, this is the Christ, the Messiah, the one of whom the Christmas angels had sung, *“Unto you is born ... a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord.”* The One of whom John the Baptist had said, *“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* The One of whom the voice of God had said in ringing clarity from the open heavens, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

Why then this death march? Why this criminal execution? Why this seemingly unnecessary torture and bloodshed? Here, O sinner, you come face to face with the problem of sin.

In the face of such horrible consequences no one can think lightly of sin and its fearful punishment. At the mention of “sin and the sinner,” let no one be content to think of some jail or penitentiary; or of the people in the slums of our cities; or of marijuana-puffing and dope-injecting, pleasure-crazed and thrill-seeking delinquents; or of the noisy revelry and lewd immorality of our day.

Christ’s blood-stained sacrifice also points the accusing finger at you and me and cries, *You are the man or you are the woman.* It is high time that we come to grips with this problem of sin.

The hymnist writes,<sup>3</sup>

Ye who think of sin but lightly,  
Nor suppose the evil great,  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate.

Mark the sacrifice appointed;  
See who bears the awful load;  
'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed,  
Son of man and Son of God.

*See who bears the awful load!* — Let us then under the gracious direction of the Holy Spirit pause in these solemn and hallowed moments on the anniversary of our Lord's crucifixion to meditate upon the subject: *The Sinner's Substitute*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Sinner's Substitute.**

How greatly this world needs a substitute because of its diseases! When last did you open your eyes to see the fact that this world is spiritually sick, hopelessly weak and unhealthy? In this same 53d chapter of Isaiah from which this Introit is taken, Jesus the Messiah is portrayed as "*a man of sorrows;*" as one "*who is acquainted with grief.*"

St. Paul in addressing the congregation at Philippi says, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped; but emptied Himself: and took upon Himself the form of a servant and was born in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" <sup>4</sup>

Yes, Jesus became associated with human beings and experienced the many struggles of human existence. He was subject to our infirmities, and by partaking of the same, He truly understood the problem of human suffering.

### **2. The Fatal Disease**

In the great chapter from which our text is taken the prophet Isaiah describes this as a great infirmity or disease. Without a doubt the greatest affliction, the most destructive disease which has fallen on the whole human race is sin itself. And the matter becomes all the more serious when we come to realise that this sin-sickness is fatal.

Scripture says in Romans 5:12, *through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin.* And in Ezekiel 18:4, *The soul who sins shall die.*<sup>5</sup> And in

Romans 6:23, *the wages of sin is death*. What a hopeless outlook! According to our natural state there is nothing in us that can effect a cure for the disease of sin.

Our physical bodies, so wondrously made by God, are such miraculous chemical laboratories that they automatically produce and provide that which is necessary to heal and cure the body — for example, open wounds form a scab and heal over while underneath new tissue is produced through mysterious chemical reactions. Or should inflammation take place, the body produces its own fever to burn out the enemy bacteria. Or when a bone of the body is broken, again the chemistry laboratory goes into action to produce those elements which mend and heal the break, even stronger than the original bone.

### **Sin Defiled Us**

But not so with our spiritual infirmities, our sin-sickness. Here there is no natural cure or automatic recovery. By nature — being “*shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin*”<sup>6</sup> — our souls have become so contaminated with the “enemy bacteria” of sin that there can be only a process of continuous weakening which results in ultimate death.

Let’s face it — you and I as we are by nature are totally and helplessly incapable of curing our soul-sickness. We are bound to die the death of deaths — hell with its everlasting torments.

### **3. A Ray of Hope**

Here Jesus comes into the picture. He, the Great Physician, came to cure our spiritual infirmities by taking them upon Himself. “*Nonsense*,” says the sceptic. “*How can the doctor cure the patient by claiming the disease for himself?*” Incomprehensible, yes! But true — as true as God’s own Word is true.

Our text says, *the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*. Elsewhere in Scripture we read, <sup>21</sup>*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*<sup>7</sup> And again, <sup>24</sup>*who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.*<sup>8</sup> Yes, that is what our text means when it so dramatically declares, *the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*.

### **The Necessity of Treatment**

But before you or I can appreciate this, Jesus must submit us to His treatment and cause His cure to take effect on us. He must overpower and overthrow the very cause of all our spiritual malady, namely, sin itself. This He alone can do. And this He has done as the sinner's Substitute.

How? Every demand that Almighty God made of us under the precepts of His holy Law — demands which we could not meet — Christ our Substitute has met for us.

That same holy Law of God placed a curse upon us because of our failure to obey it. We read in Genesis 3:17, <sup>17</sup> *Then to Adam [God] said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.*

And again, in Deuteronomy 11:26-28, <sup>26</sup> *Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse,* <sup>27</sup> *"the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today;* <sup>28</sup> *"and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known."<sup>9</sup>*

Likewise in Jeremiah 11:3-4, *'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant" <sup>4</sup> "which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you.'*

In other words, disobedience to God's holy Law in any form brings down from heaven the wrath and the curse of Almighty God. All this is summarised simply, effectively, and undeniably in Galatians 3:10 where we read, <sup>10</sup> *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*

#### 4. In Our Stead

Here again Christ has become the sinner's Substitute. Our curse became His curse; our sin was charged against Him; our guilt was laid upon Him. Listen, *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ... the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

## **That First Good Friday**

On this solemn occasion we turn back the years to that blackest day in the history of the world, the first Good Friday, often called Black Friday: black, not only because of the horrible injustice done to the just and holy Son of God — but utterly black, jet black, because the sin, shame, wickedness, debauchery, and indescribable sins of all men throughout all generations is brought to Calvary's Holy Hill.

There the innocent Jesus assumes the guilt for all. As a lamb brought to slaughter so our Lord Jesus “opened not His mouth.” He accepted the burden of your sin without complaint.

### **The Anguish of the Damned**

How serious was it? How grievous is the wrath of God? Hear the Lord Jesus as He suffers the tortures and torments of the damned, crying out in that fearful moment of extreme soul-agony, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

Forsaken of God; despised and rejected by the majority of those who stood around the cross; doubted even by His faithful disciples and followers— He now *“must tread the winepress alone.”*<sup>10</sup>

There is none that can help Him at this moment when God's curse rests upon His only-begotten Son because of our iniquities. Here, says the apostle Paul, Christ *“having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”)*<sup>11</sup>

### **With His Stripes We Are Healed**

No longer need we fear the wrath and the anger of God, for Christ has redeemed us; salvation is ours; once again sin-cursed man is at peace with God.

The hymnist writes,<sup>12</sup>

O the height of Jesus' love!  
Higher than the heavens above,  
Deeper than the depths of sea,  
Lasting as eternity;  
Love that found me—wondrous thought!  
Found me when I sought Him not.

Yes, all this because God loved us — loved us in spite of what we have done to offend Him; loved us even though we have turned our backs upon Him.

Our text says, *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.* Despicable and worthless though we are by nature, yet the Good Shepherd sought the lost sheep. He entered the valley of the shadow of death to bring us back; *“found us when we sought Him not”*; just as He Himself had prophesied, *“I am the Good Shepherd,”* so *“the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”*<sup>13</sup>

### 5. Redeemed to Serve

Now that we are once again “redeemed, restored, and forgiven,” what about our future life? It does little good for us to come into God’s house on this hallowed day unless with the Holy Spirit’s prompting we humbly pray for a stronger faith in the forgiveness wrought for us on Calvary.

It is a worthless waste of time to *“Come to Calvary’s holy mountain”*<sup>14</sup> unless we leave this scene with the firm determination to rededicate our lives to more consecrated service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luther, a master of words, explains the phrase with significant clarity when he says in the meaning of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ - true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary - is my Lord.

At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

All this He has done that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 27:25

<sup>2</sup> Luke 23:28

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<sup>3</sup> Hymn 70

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:5-8

<sup>5</sup> Also Ezekiel 18:20

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 51:5

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 2:24

<sup>9</sup> See also Deut. 27:14-26

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 63:3

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 3:13

<sup>12</sup> Hymn 170

<sup>13</sup> John 10:11

<sup>14</sup> Hymn 71