

Pierced For Our Transgressions

Isaiah 53:4-6

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As we anticipate, this week, the celebration of the death and resurrection of our Lord, I decided to step away from our study of Ephesians 2 this week and next, especially as we prepare our hearts for Good Friday. I thought it would be good for us all to seriously contemplate the death of Christ. Not in terms of His physical suffering, but in terms, rather, of the divine transaction that occurred at the cross. When you think about the cross, the key question to ask and to answer is this, why did Jesus Christ die? Theologians call your answer to that question your view of the nature of the atonement.

It's important for you to understand that there are a number of flawed views about the nature of the atonement, or why Christ died. If we were to go back through church history, there have been more than a half a dozen false views offered as to why Jesus died that day. I want to briefly list for you, as we begin this morning, the three primary false theories about the atonement that are alive and well in the church today. Some of the false views have died in the past, but there are three of them that are more than alive today across the church of Jesus Christ.

The first false view is that Jesus' death was a ransom to Satan. It's called the ransom to Satan theory. It is a popular misconception. Although I don't know of anyone who actually teaches this, a pastor or a church leader who teaches this, it is a very common misconception among the people of God. This view teaches that Christ's death was a ransom paid to Satan to purchase sinners back from Satan because of his rightful claim to them. So Jesus died for Satan.

A second false theory of the atonement, not only the ransom to Satan theory, but the example theory, the example theory. This theory started with a sixteenth century heretic named Socinius. Today this view is held by Unitarians and by those who call themselves "Openness Theologians," those who believe that God does not know or determine the future but rather reacts to it. This view says that Christ's death did not atone for sin. Instead, Christ's death merely provided an example of faith and obedience, and as we see the example of Christ even willing to be obedient to the point of death, that inspires us to live a similar life of obedience.

The third flawed view of the atonement that's increasing in popularity today is called the moral influence theory, the moral influence theory. This flawed view teaches that Christ did not have to die to atone for sin. Instead, His death merely served as a kind of profound demonstration of God's love and that demonstration of God's love softens the hearts of people and moves them to repent and to follow Christ. So Christ's death was all about simply demonstrating the love of

God. This is the approach, the view, that is becoming more common, increasingly common among the emergent church.

Two men who are connected that movement have really espoused this view the most succinctly, their names are Steve Chalke and Alan Mann. They wrote a controversial book together called *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Chalke is a well-known writer and media figure in the Christian community in Britain. Mann is his researcher and collaborator. Together they critique what they call, “the myth of redemptive violence.” Listen to what they write in this awful book, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, “The cross isn’t a form of cosmic child abuse, a vengeful father punishing his son for an offense he has not even committed. Understandably,” they say, “both people inside and outside of the church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement that God is love. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind, but borne by His Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus’ own teaching to love your enemies.” Chalke and Mann go on to say that the cross simply serves as this, sort of, profound demonstration of the love of God.

The question that we have to ask, it’s the question I often bring you back to, is this, but what does the Bible say? What does the Bible teach about the death of Christ? Perhaps nowhere does the Bible present the divine intention that lies behind the death of Christ more clearly or more beautifully than in that most familiar of Old Testament passages, Isaiah 53, where I’d like for you to turn with me this morning, Isaiah 53. We had the opportunity a few weeks ago during our Sola Conference to look at Isaiah 53:11 and my mind keeps coming back to this chapter. And as we contemplate the death of our Lord this week I thought there was no better place for us to come.

Isaiah’s name means Yahweh is salvation, God is salvation, and that is the major theme of Isaiah’s prophecy. As he unfolds that theme, he explains that Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God of the Nations, will spiritually rescue a remnant of Earth’s people from the just penalty of their sin. And God will accomplish that salvation through a most unique person, a person that Isaiah calls, the Servant of Yahweh.

In the second half of Isaiah’s prophecy there are four passages that focus on this special person and His mission. These four passages are sometimes called the four servant songs. These passages about the Servant of Yahweh, in Isaiah, speak of Christ. It was during His earthly ministry that Jesus applied Isaiah 53 and the death of the Servant to Himself. Listen to His words in Luke 22. Jesus said, “For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me,” and then He quotes from Isaiah 53, ““AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS,” for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment.” So the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah is none other than Jesus Christ; He Himself claimed that to be true.

The fourth of these servant passages is the one I want us to look at this morning. It begins in Isaiah 52:13 and runs all the way through the end of chapter 53. So Isaiah 53 then is part of this fourth poem or song about this special Servant from God who is on a spiritual rescue mission. This fourth poem consists of five stanzas composed of three verses each. So if you want to mark it out, Isaiah 52:13 through 15, the first stanza, 53:1 to 3 is the second stanza, 53:4 to 6 the third stanza, 7 to 9 the fourth stanza, and 10 to 12 the fifth stanza. Now, when you look at that structure of five stanzas it is not an accident that the third stanza, the stanza that stands at the center of this beautiful Hebrew poem about the Messiah, tells us why it is that He must come, why it is that He must suffer, why He has to die.

Let me read it for you, these familiar words, Isaiah 53:4,

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.

Now the theme of those verses is the divine reason for the death of Christ. In a word, it's substitution. The divine reason that lies behind the death of Christ is substitution. You understand the word substitution, it simply means the act of taking the place of another. Jesus' death was all about taking the place of others. That's what we mean by substitution.

This shouldn't be a surprise because the entire Old Testament sacrificial system, which intended to point to Christ, is substitutionary. I won't take the time to take you back to the offerings in Leviticus, but if we were to go back to Leviticus, even starting with the very first one of the five mentioned in Leviticus 1, the burnt offering, in Leviticus 1:4, Moses writes, the offeror, the worshipper, the one making the sacrifice, "will lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make an atonement on his behalf," in his place. You fast forward to the great day of atonement, Yom Kippur, recorded for us in Leviticus 16, you read this in verse 20, it says,

When he finishes [*the priest finishes*] atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, [*This is, by the way, where we get our word*

scapegoat. This live goat, Aaron was to place both of his hands on the head of this animal] and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; [*You can't get more comprehensive than that. Aaron is to stand there and confess the sins of the people over this animal with his hands on its head.*] and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away to the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness. The goat shall bear on itself all the iniquities into a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness [*to die, basically*].

So here you have this picture of the transfer of human guilt. What you have in the Old Testament sacrificial system is a picture of the transfer of guilt, of a substitute. The guilty worshipper transfers his guilt on to the head of that animal, that innocent victim, and then he slays the innocent animal. That is a picture of substitution. In the same way, Isaiah 53 is filled with the language of substitution. And Isaiah doesn't leave this idea of substitution general, he makes it very specific. He develops it and especially in the three verses that I just read for you.

In these verses, as we walk our way through them this morning, I want us to learn together three crucial characteristics of Christ's substitutionary death, three crucial characteristics of the death of Christ as our substitute. The first characteristic that we need to embrace and understand is that it was voluntary substitution, it was voluntary substitution. Verse 4, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted." In the Hebrew language there is a contrast built into the language of verse 4. The emphasis of the Hebrew text falls on the pronoun He and our English translators have tried to pick that up and reflect that in English by translating it, "He Himself." "He Himself bore our griefs." The point Isaiah is making is that Jesus' death was voluntary. "He Himself willingly bore our griefs." "He Himself willingly carried our sorrows." Jesus volunteered for this role. This is a point that Isaiah wants us to see and understand. And notice what it was He bore and carried. The Hebrew words are very interesting, they are translated here as "griefs" and "sorrows." Those Hebrew words literally are "sicknesses" and "pains." "Surely our sicknesses He Himself bore and our pains He carried."

Charismatic theologians try to use this verse and others here to argue that Jesus purchased physical healing in the atonement. And in one sense, of course, that's true. Every blessing we enjoy, including physical healing, was purchased for us at the cross. But this is not a promise of physical healing to everyone who has the faith to believe. The rest of Scripture clearly contradicts that and that's not what this verse is about, it's not talking about physical healing.

Why then does Isaiah use the language of pain and disease? Well, look at the context, you have to look at it in the flow of its context. Clearly, the stress of this passage is not on physical healing, but on a remedy for sin and for the consequences of sin. Look at verse 5, "transgressions," "iniquities," "chastening." Verse 8, "the transgression of my people." Verse

11, “iniquities.” Verse 12, “bore the sin of many.” This chapter is about the Messiah on a spiritual rescue mission to rescue people from sin and its penalty.

So in this context sicknesses and pains are word pictures about the problem of sin. Sickness is describing the reality of sin in all of its debilitating nature in our hearts and souls. It’s describing sin as a kind of terminal illness. That’s what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 17. He said, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and it is desperately sick.” Your heart is terminally ill, Jeremiah said. That’s why Isaiah uses the word sicknesses here. And pains? By pains he’s referring to the consequences that the state of disease produces. So he’s talking about both sin, sicknesses, and pains, the consequences of that sickness, of that terminal disease of our souls.

And notice what Jesus did with these things, “Our griefs,” or sicknesses, “He Himself bore.” The Hebrew word for bore here means to pick up a heavy load. But the word for carried, that’s translated carried in the second part of the verse, means to shoulder as your own. So Jesus not only picked up the heavy load of our terminal soul’s illness and the pains and consequences that came with it, but He also shouldered them as if they were His own. That’s the picture behind these two words. He picked them up and then He claimed them as His own.

Understand the emphasis in this verse, it’s that Christ volunteered for this role. Look down at verse 10, “He would render Himself as a guilt offering.” Verse 12, “He poured out Himself.” Understand that Jesus’ life was not taken from Him. Instead, He voluntarily laid it down. He volunteered for this job. This is consistently the message of Scripture. You remember His own words in John 10 when He said, “I lay down my life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down [what?] on My own initiative.” I volunteered to do this.

Not only does verse 4 emphasize that Jesus’ death was voluntary, it also stresses that it was solitary, Jesus acted entirely alone, and we can contribute nothing to it. As Alec Motyer writes in his commentary, “What the Servant did, He did alone. The emphatic He that begins verse 4 separates Him from us. He was the agent, we simply the beneficiaries.”

As you contemplate the suffering of Christ this week, I want you to remember that His death was not a tragic accident. He was not a good man caught up in some power struggle between the Jewish leaders and Rome. Seven hundred years before His life and death, Isaiah told us that He would willingly lay down His life for sinners and He was the only one that could do it.

This isn’t what people thought was happening though. When the people of Israel and its leaders looked at Christ that day hanging on the cross, what did they think? What do many people even think today about Christ? Well, you can see the common attitude in the second half of verse 4, “Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.” He volunteered, but that isn’t how we saw it.

The prophet Isaiah says that apart from revelation we would conclude that Christ must be getting what He deserves. “We ourselves.” This refers to the prophet Isaiah, it refers to the Jews of his time, it refers to the Jews of Jesus’ time, it even refers to us, as humanity. All of us, as “we ourselves esteemed Him,” that is, we thought or considered that there were justifiable reasons that Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross. What were they? Look at the expressions at the end of verse 4, “we esteemed Him stricken.” This is an interesting Hebrew word. It’s used in 2 Kings 15:5 when Yahweh struck Uzziah the king with leprosy. As one commentator says, “We concluded that Jesus was justly afflicted by God with a terrible and shocking disease.” He was “Smitten of God,” that is, He was made to suffer by God for His own sin, “and afflicted,” that’s a general term that encompasses the other two.

Isn’t this exactly what the Jews in Jesus’ day thought, as he was even presented to Pilot that morning? You remember in John 19, what did the leaders of Israel say to Pilot, ““We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.”” He deserved whatever He gets; that’s what we would have thought too, apart from revelation.

But Jesus was the innocent volunteer. There’s no mention in this chapter of the Servant’s sin. In fact, Isaiah goes out of his way to make sure we know that Jesus was not suffering for His own sin. Look at verse 9, “He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.” Verse 10, He’s called “a guilt offering.” If you’re familiar with the Old Testament at all, you know that the offerings offered to God had to be what? Perfectly without spot and without blemish. In verse 11 this Servant is called “the Righteous One, My Servant.” He is utterly and completely in conformity with the law of God. So He’s not dying for His own sins, as we might conclude. Instead, He is the gracious volunteer, He has volunteered to substitute for us. He voluntarily laid down His life.

Now, you’ve heard this many times and it can, sort of, just die in our ears, but I want you to think about the implications of this. As you think about the death of Christ this week, realize that Jesus knew from eternity past exactly what His death would be like. He knew exactly what He would endure at the Father’s hand. He knew exactly what He would endure at the Romans’ hand. He knew exactly what He would endure at the Jews’ hands. And yet, in eternity past, with you in mind, He volunteered to die. How could Jesus demonstrate His love for you more profoundly than that? Remember what He said to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, in John 15, He said, ““Greater love has no man than this, that he would [*what?*] lay down his life for his friends.””

You understand, the fact that Jesus volunteered to die in your place, as your substitute, is the greatest proof of His love for you as an individual that there could ever be. If you’re in Christ, this is how Jesus thinks of you. If you had been the only one, if I had been the only one, I’m convinced that Jesus would have offered Himself, voluntarily laid down His life for us, in our place. So Jesus’ death was a voluntary substitution.

Secondly, His death was a penal substitution. Verse 5, “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.” The heart of this verse is what theologians call, penal substitution. Now, that’s not a word that we use frequently, but we do use it.

In fact, when I lived in Southern California, everywhere you went there would be signs. Because of just the sheer numbers of people there had to be signs posted everywhere, about what you were not supposed to do, signs forbidding various things. For example, like parking in handicapped spaces or like skateboarding on the sidewalks, which was a constant problem for Sheila. And the sign that you would see, the sign had a summary of the law: skateboarding forbidden on sidewalks in crowded areas, or whatever it said, it was a summary statement of the law, and then under that summary statement was the exact number of the law code from the California penal code.

The penal code, the law, serves two important purposes. First, it describes the violations of the law, if you do this you are breaking the law, and secondly, it assigns the penalty for each violation, whether it’s a ticket or whether it’s jail or whether it’s death. So, the penal code describes what a violation of the law is and it describes what the penalty for those violations will be.

So penal then, means having to do with the penalty for violating the law. You recognize the word penal as a part of the word penalty, they go together, they mean the same thing. So penal means having to do with a penalty for violating the law. So that when we say Jesus’ death was penal, we mean that it had to do with the punishment for breaking the law. But we’ve already seen that He didn’t break the law, so it obviously wasn’t in regards to His breaking of the law, the penalty for His breach of the law. Rather, it had to do with ours. And it wasn’t man’s law, but God’s law.

Notice how Isaiah in verse 5 here describes our problem with the law of God. He does it in two words. Notice, he says, “for our transgressions.” That’s not a word we use a lot, we don’t talk about transgressions, really, outside the life of the church, but it’s a powerful word. It’s a word that literally means, willful rebellion against rightful authority. That’s what the word means, to willingly rebel against the law, that’s transgressions. And each of us has committed them. Our sins, as God sees them, are willful acts of rebellion against His law. You may not see it that way, you may, as we all like to do, put a good spin on it, but that’s how God sees it. They are willful acts of rebellion against His law.

The second word that describes our problem here, with the law, is the word iniquities. The basic meaning of this word iniquity is to twist or distort or pervert what is right. It describes the perversion that we make of God’s law, how we tweak it to make it mean what we want it to mean so we can do what we want to do. It describes the twistedness of our character. We take the law of God that’s even written on our hearts and we twist it, and we twist ourselves, in

various forms of perversion. It also speaks of the penalty, the guilt that comes because of that twisting of the law.

So understand what Isaiah is saying here, without the work of the Servant of Yahweh we are all in a state of willful rebellion against the law of God and we twist and distort His requirements so that they bear no resemblance to what He really wants of us. Both of those words have to do with our response to God's law. This is a serious problem. The death of Christ then is penal, that is, it has to do with the penalty for our breaking of the law, for our willful acts of rebellion, for our twisting and distorting and perverting God's way.

Notice what Christ's payment was, He paid for this penalty. Notice the prepositions, "for our transgressions," "for our iniquities," "for our well-being," "by His scourging." They all underscore that Christ was acting in behalf of others, not Himself. What He's doing here, He's doing as a substitute. And again, the pronoun He is emphatic in verse 5. We could translate it like this, "He and no one else." And notice what He did, notice the payment He offered, "He was pierced." It's a Hebrew word that means to be pierced completely through; it speaks of a violent, painful death. Jesus was pierced through for our willful acts of rebellion.

I want you to think just back this week, on the sins that you have committed. The thoughts that you have allowed that you know are contrary to God's law. The attitudes that you have fostered that violate His purpose for human beings. The words you have spoken that were not words intended to build up the people around you, but intended to destroy and to maim and to ruin. The behavior that you have participated in and acted out that you absolutely know, and your conscience has rebuked you and said, this is wrong, this is a violation of God's law and His will. What you need to understand is that for every one of those sins, if you're in Christ, what Isaiah is saying is that Christ was pierced through for every one of those willful acts of rebellion.

It says, "He was crushed." This is a very picturesque Hebrew word as well. It's used in Job of crushing a moth. It speaks of severe suffering, having the life crushed out of you, as it were. Jesus endured the most severe sufferings, having the life crushed out of Him, for our iniquities, for our moral twistedness. He goes on to say, "The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him." The word chastening is a word which means discipline. It speaks of correction by word or by act. Here, clearly, it's by the act of punishment. So the just punishment to purchase our well-being with God fell on Christ.

By the way, these things aren't all about just physical pain. The physical pain Jesus endured was great, and the Gospels record that, but His primary suffering was not physical. Understand, there have been lots of martyrs who died physical deaths, even deaths that were as violent as Jesus' death. You see, what happened that day on the cross during those six hours is that Jesus endured something much more profound than physical pain. You see it even in this chapter. Look down, Isaiah 53:11, "As a result of the anguish of His soul," the toilsome labor of His soul. What you have to understand is that for those six hours that day on the cross God poured out on Jesus the

penalty for your sin. He treated Jesus as you deserve to be treated. And for those six hours Jesus endured not merely the physical suffering inflicted upon Him by the Romans, but He endured the wrath of God against your sin and mine.

Verse 5 concludes by saying, “by His scourging.” The word scourging is a word that speaks of open lacerations, “by,” or at the cost of, “His open lacerations we are healed.” That’s what Jesus did. He was pierced. He was crushed. He was chastened. He was scourged. And what’s the result of all of that for us? What’s the result of His suffering? Well, first and foremost, full payment of our sins. Verse 4 says, “He bore,” He picked up and He carried off. It describes exactly what happened, like to the goat on the day of atonement, the scapegoat, when Christ picked up our sins. It’s as if we put our hands on the head of Christ and He bore our sins and He carried them away. You see, in my place on the cross, Jesus paid in full both the moral guilt and the actual penalty of my sins.

You remember what John the Baptist said in John 1 when he saw Jesus coming. He said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” He picks them up and He carries them off, like that scapegoat into the wilderness to die. Galatians 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.” Hebrews 9:28, “Christ also was offered once to bear the sins of many.” Jesus made full payment for our sins. He drained the cup of the wrath of God and there’s not a drop left for me. It’s why Paul can say in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to the one that is in Christ Jesus.” Full payment, full payment of the penalty I deserved.

There’s a second result of His suffering here in verse 5, it’s peace with God. Notice verse 5, the third phrase there says, “The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him.” The Hebrew word translated well-being is a word you know, even if you don’t know much Hebrew, it’s the word shalom, peace. The clear implication is that without the intervention of Christ we would still be at war with God. But now, we have peace, peace with God. This isn’t talking about a peace I feel in my heart, although that’s true as well. This is talking about an objective peace outside of myself, the end of a war with God. How does that happen? Paul explains it in Romans 5:1, “Therefore having been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God.”

There’s a third result of Christ’s suffering listed here in verse 5. It’s wholeness. He says, “by His scourging we are healed.” We are made spiritually whole. In Isaiah 6:10 Isaiah uses this word to refer to spiritual healing. In fact, our Lord quotes Isaiah 6:10 in Matthew 13:15. Listen to Him, He says, ““FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY CAN SCARCELY HEAR, THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, THEY WOULD HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, THEY WOULD UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,””” or repent, ““AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.””” He’s talking about spiritual healing, full payment for sins. Peace with God and spiritual wholeness, spiritual healing, that’s what Christ accomplished in His death for us, and folks, it is certain.

You notice that all the verbs in verse 5 are written in the past tense, as if they already occurred, but when Isaiah wrote these magnificent words it was 700 years before Christ. How could he write in the past tense? He was using what Hebrew scholars call the prophetic perfect. You see, when the prophets prophesied about what God was going to do, it was so certain that they spoke as if it had already been done. Isaiah wants us to know that the death of Christ corrects our standing before the law of God.

Now, maybe you don't take your sin very seriously, or the law of God very seriously, but let me guarantee you of something, God takes both very seriously. In fact, Scripture says that each of us has broken God's law and because of that we do not deserve any display of God's goodness. God doesn't owe us continued life. He doesn't owe us the temporal blessings we enjoy in this life. He doesn't owe us hearing the gospel. He owes us nothing but eternal hell. We are slaves to sin, we're under the curse of God's law, we are completely without personal righteousness, and we deserve the immediate and eternal wrath of God against our sins. But Christ died to pay that penalty. He died in the place of, or as the substitute of, all who will believe, in order that He would satisfy the wrath of God against our sins. His death was penal substitution.

Let me ask you Christian, do you really believe that? Do you really believe that the death of Christ fully paid the penalty of every sin you have ever committed or will ever commit? Do you believe that it's given you objective peace with God? Do you believe that it's given you spiritual wholeness and healing? If you're not a follower of Jesus Christ you can enjoy those wonderful results of Christ's death if you will simply turn from your sin and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He's promised to respond to you just like that.

There's a third characteristic of Christ's death. Not only was it a voluntary substitution, not only was it a penal substitution, thirdly, it was divine imputation, divine imputation. Verse 6, "All of us like sheep of gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." Isaiah reminds us again here of our sin problem in two unforgettable lines.

"All of us like sheep have gone astray." All, universally true, all humans, like this great flock of sheep, have strayed as if there were no shepherd. That's the picture behind this word, this line. But then he turns personal, "All of us." Isaiah includes himself, Israel, and all humanity, in this, sort of, sweeping indictment. "All of us like sheep have gone astray." This is a picture that those living in an agricultural society, with sheep in every field, in every village, would have clearly understood. It's a common biblical metaphor for human sin, it denotes estrangement and separation and alienation. We have strayed from our Creator.

How did we do it? How did we create the distance between us and God? The next line tells us, "Each of us," that is, every individual, you and me, "has turned." That's an interesting verb that points to deliberate choice. You see, our problem didn't happen by accident. We're not basically good people who woke up one morning and discovered we were sinners. We turned,

we chose to turn away from God, and we “turn to our own way,” that is, to our own predictable patterns of sinful thinking and behaving.

But what is the relationship between my sin and Christ’s death? Ultimately this is the question, how could the Righteous One described in this passage be a substitute for me? How could He stand in my place? That’s an important question, it’s a key question, and verse 6 takes us deeper and explains what lies at the heart of substitution. Notice the last part of the verse, “the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” Folks, there is the heart of the gospel. It’s our iniquity, but it falls on Him.

In a word, this is what theologians call imputation. We talked about it several weeks ago. There is no more important word for Christians than this word, imputation. It’s a financial term. It comes from an old Latin word that means to settle an account. To impute means to credit to someone’s account. In Romans 4, as Paul develops the doctrine of justification, he uses this term some 11 times. So imputation is at the heart and soul of justification. It is at the heart and soul of the gospel.

And although the words impute and credit don’t appear in Isaiah 53, the concept absolutely permeates the whole passage, and imputation especially lies at the heart of verse 6. Notice it again, “the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” The Hebrew verb translated “cause to fall” here could better be translated, to strike or to hit. “Yahweh caused the guilt and punishment for our sin, instead of striking us, to strike Christ.” That does not mean that Christ became a sinner, doesn’t mean He was actually guilty of sin. What it does mean is that God imputed, or credited, my sin to Christ and then He treated Jesus as if He were a sinner, as if He were me.

For everyone who believes or whoever will believe in Christ, God treated Christ as if He were you. That day on the cross, as Jesus hung there for those six hours, God, in an amazing act of grace, caused all of my sin, with all of its guilt, with all of its penalty, to strike Christ. He credited it to Jesus Christ. And then for those six hours He treated Jesus as if He had done every foul thing that I have ever done, and if you’re in Christ, every foul thing you have ever done. And for those six hours He poured out every bit of justice that our sins deserved, on His perfect innocent Son.

Some false teachers in the church today, connected with the emergent church, call this divine child abuse. But for us who have no other hope, it’s the most wonderful truth in all the world. God credited my sin to Christ and treated Him as if He had lived my life. This is the good news about imputation. If our sins fall on Him, they’re no longer on us. If He pays, we don’t have to pay.

The fullest New Testament reference to Isaiah 53 is in 1 Peter 1 and as we close I want you to turn there, 1 Peter 1, because Peter applies Isaiah 53, these rich truths of substitution and

imputation. The primary application in 1 Peter 2:21-23 is to those who are suffering unjustly. He tells them to patiently endure unjust suffering just as Jesus did in the face of His crucifixion. That's Peter's main point. But then Peter springs off of that in verse 24 of 1 Peter 1 and he gives us another application. He quotes from Isaiah 53, "He himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that," here is why He died, "so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds," He gave you spiritual wholeness, He healed you. You know what Peter is arguing? He's saying, listen, if you've experienced the substitution that Jesus died in your place, suffering what you deserved, then "die to sin and live to righteousness." He died to make you spiritually whole, stop living like you still have your terminal disease, "die to sin and live to righteousness."

And in verse 25 he applies it yet another way. He says, if you've experienced the substitutionary death of Christ then follow Christ as your Shepherd, verse 25, "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls." Follow Christ, he's saying, obey Christ's word, that's what he means, that's what he means by follow Christ. That's how we follow Christ today, we obey His words. Jesus Himself said, in Luke 6, "Why do you call me "Lord, Lord" and not do what I say?" Or in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." If you've come to benefit from the incredible sacrifice of our Lord, from His substitution, from the reality that your sin was credited to Jesus Christ, and God, for those six hours, treated Him as if He had lived your life, then "die to sin and live to righteousness," and follow Christ, obey His Word, be His disciple.

Those are profound words in Isaiah 53 and they are to have implications for us. This week, as you contemplate His death, I want you to think about all that we've studied this morning. Remind yourself of the reality that His substitution, His dying in our place, was voluntary and in such a powerful way, a demonstration of His love. That His death on our behalf was a wonderful testimony to penal substitution, that is, suffering the penalty for our sins. And that it could only happen because of that amazing divine act of imputation, that Jesus was credited with your sins on the cross, as He was mine. Let's pray together.

Our Father, I feel like our time together this morning has been such a woefully inadequate reflection of this magnificent passage. But I pray that Your spirit would take Your Word taught and that He would make up for those weaknesses in His power, and that this truth, the truth that lies behind the death of Christ would grip our hearts. Lord, that it would change our thinking about this week as we remember His death.

And Father, that it would cause us, as Peter admonished us, to be willing to "die to sin and to live to righteousness" since we have been made spiritually whole, healed by His wounds. And Father, that we would follow the Shepherd of our souls, that we would obey Him, that we would follow Him, that we would hear His words and do them. We pray all of this in Jesus' name, amen.