

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Healed by His Bruises

Isaiah 53

Key verse: “He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Isaiah 53 presents a vivid, prophetic picture of the promised Messiah—the one who was to suffer and die for the sins of Israel and of the world. This chapter of the Bible was written centuries before Jesus lived and died. Yet, Christians see in Isaiah 53 one of the most detailed and specific Old Testament prophecies of Christ, for example:

Verse 2 speaks of the Messiah as “like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground.” This verse echoes other passages, such as Isaiah 11:1, predicting that the Messiah would grow from the “stump of Jesse,” meaning from the ancestral line of King David.

Verse 2 also predicts that the coming Messiah, though a king, would have none of the trappings of royalty: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him” (NIV).

Verse 5 looks forward through the years to the nails that would pierce Jesus’ hands and feet at Calvary: “He was wounded for our transgressions.” Those wounds and the sacrificial love they represent would be the means of our salvation: “upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.”

Verse 7 brings to mind how Jesus would remain silent when interrogated by the chief priests and Pilate: “He was oppressed and afflicted yet did not open his mouth” (NIV).

Verse 8 foretells that Jesus, the Messiah, would be unjustly tried and convicted: “By oppression and judgment he was taken away” (NIV).

Christians see in verse 9 a description of the fact that Jesus’ crucifixion between two criminals would normally mean he would be buried with “the wicked.” Yet, wealthy Joseph of Arimathea gave Jesus a burial in his own private tomb: “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (NIV).

Verse 11 gives prophetic testimony to the Messiah’s resurrection: “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied” (NIV).

I recently read Tim Keller's book *The Reason for God*. Keller writes there about the substitutional atonement of Christ (the doctrine that Jesus took our place on the cross of Calvary). Keller says that "in a real world of relationships, it is impossible to love people with a problem or a need without in some sense sharing or even changing places with them. All real-life love involves some form of this exchange." Keller goes on to share two examples that illustrate this truth:

"Imagine you come into contact with a man who is innocent, but who is being hunted down by secret agents or by the government or by some other powerful group. He reaches out to you for help. If you don't help him, he will probably die, but if you ally with him, you—who were perfectly safe and secure—will be in mortal danger....It's him or you. He will experience increased safety and security through your involvement, but only because you are willing to enter into his insecurity and vulnerability.

"Consider parenting. Children come into the world in a condition of complete dependence. They cannot operate as self-sufficient, independent agents unless their parents give up much of their own independence and freedom for years. If you don't allow your children to hinder your freedom in work and play at all, and if you only give to your children when it doesn't inconvenience you, your children will grow up physically only. In all sorts of other ways they will remain emotionally needy, troubled, and over dependent. The choice is clear. You can either sacrifice your freedom or theirs. It's them or you. To love your child well, you must decrease that they may increase. You must be willing to enter into the dependency they have so eventually they can experience the freedom and independence you have."

Keller concludes: "All life-changing love toward people with serious needs is substitutional sacrifice. If you become personally involved with them, in some way, their weaknesses flow toward you as your strengths flow toward them....How can God be a God of love if he does not become personally involved in suffering the same violence, oppression, grief, weakness, and pain that we experience? The answer to that question is twofold: First, God can't. Second, only one major religion even claims that God does."

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