

God's Solution for Our Sin*Isaiah 52:13-53:6*

Introduction: In preparation for Easter, we are pausing from our study of the Sermon on the Mount to consider Isaiah 52-53. The New Testament makes numerous references to this passage and emphatically asserts that Isaiah was talking about the suffering of Jesus Christ. As Steve mentioned on Sunday, these chapters describe how people “saw” the person known as the Servant of the Lord. Our intent is to look closely at the suffering of Jesus as we prepare for Easter. May this rich passage, written some 700+ years before the events being described, help prepare our hearts for our Good Friday and Easter observances. May we truly see more clearly the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Opening Discussion: What, if anything, do you do to help prepare your heart for the celebration of Easter?

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:6

1. What are you initially struck by in reading this passage? What sticks out to you?
2. What is the breadth of impact that is revealed of the Suffering Servant's ministry in 52:13-15?
3. What does it mean that this Servant would "sprinkle many nations" (v. 15)?
4. Isaiah 53:1-3 speaks to how people would initially view the Suffering Servant. In what ways was this prophecy fulfilled when Jesus came?

Steve said:

These verses use relentless repetition to drive home the point that Jesus appeared as He did because He was our substitute - He got what we deserved.

5. What does Isaiah 53:4-6 say that Jesus experienced as our substitute that we rightly deserved to experience? (notice the expressions: "our _____")
6. What verbs are used to express how Jesus suffered (v. 4-6)? List them:

7. What phrases are used to express what Jesus' suffering accomplished for us (4-6)?
8. What is true of all of us (v. 6)?
9. When you back up and get the big picture, what does Jesus' suffering tell us about ourselves?

Steve said:

The second response is for those who have already understood and received this gift of salvation. I would encourage you to understand that **Jesus' death on the cross continues to cleanse us from sin**. Even though we are forgiven, we continue to sin in various ways. Yet sometimes we're reluctant to label our actions and attitudes as **sinful**. Sometimes we justify our anger or our unkindness or our selfishness by saying, "I'm having a rough day" or "I'm really stressed" or "I'm dealing with some very difficult people." Those things may all be true, and they may explain why we are tempted to anger, unkindness, or selfishness. But those things are still sin. Those are the very type of sins that required a substitute/sacrifice/death on our behalf. And the death of Jesus on the cross continues to cleanse us from those types of sins.

Sometimes when I'm stuck spiritually, the very thing that gets me going again is admitting to God that I've actually sinned – not that I'm merely stressed or that I'm having a rough day. When there's sin, there's hope because Jesus paid for my sin. It may be that you have already accepted Jesus' payment for your sin, but that there are specific sins that keep you from experiencing God in all His fullness. You're still a new creature in Christ but you need a fresh cleansing from some sin. Perhaps it's anger or pride or lust or jealousy or greed.

10. How might it be helpful to your life with God to label your actions and attitudes as sinful instead of justifying them in some way?
11. How often is it your practice to admit to God that you've sinned?
12. We started this study by asking about what you do to prepare your heart for Easter. How might some additional focus on confession of sin this week be an appropriate heart preparation for Easter?

What is Confession?

For additional insight read this excerpt from John Ortberg's book, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (pages 129-38):

Some people wonder, "If I am a Christian and God has already forgiven me why should I have to confess?" This is looking at confession the wrong way.

Confession is not primarily something God has to do because he needs it. God is not clutching tightly to his mercy, as if we have to pry it from his fingers like a child's last cookie. We need to confess in order to heal and be changed.

Nor is confession simply an accounting procedure: "That sin was on the debit side of God's ledger; now I have confessed it, and it got erased." Confession is not mechanical. It is a practice that, done wisely, will help us become transformed.

When we practice confession well, two things happen. The first is that we are liberated from guilt. The second is that we will be at least a little less likely to sin in the same way in the future than if we had not confessed. Sin will look and feel less attractive.

So how do we practice confession in a way that begins to heal our souls? . . . Confession that helps us experience the power of forgiveness is a process, not a single act.

Preparation

The first step is preparation. We begin by placing ourselves into the care of the Spirit and asking for help. Apart from this, confession is dangerous. If left to ourselves, we are prone to self-condemnation for things we ought not to feel guilty about, or alternatively prone to glossing over the truly ugly stains that demand attention. We need help.

Self-Examination

The next step is self-examination. This entails taking time to reflect on our thoughts, words, and deeds and acknowledging that we have sinned. Historically this was known as the "prayer of examen" in which we examine the state of our conscience. . . .

A helpful approach to self-examination is to think through various categories of sin. Probably the list used most often is that of the seven deadly sins: pride, anger, lust, envy, greed, sloth, and gluttony. Where do we stand in regard to each of these? . . .

Confession should be specific, concrete, and particular. . . . At the heart of it, confession involves taking appropriate responsibility for what we have done. . . . To confess means to own up to the fact that our behavior wasn't just the result of bad parenting, poor genes, jealous siblings, or a chemical imbalance from too many Twinkies. . . . confession means saying that somewhere in the mix was a choice, and the choice was made by us, and it does not need to be excused, explained, or even understood. The choice needs to be forgiven. . . .

Perception

. . . in this step of confession, we ask for honest perception. We want to see our sins through a new lens. We begin to see them through the eyes of the person we sinned against. We struggle to see them through the eyes of God. . . .

Two Questions: Why and What Happened?

Two questions in particular help us gain a new perspective. The first one is, "Why did I do what I did?" . . . This question is critical because sin is usually tied to some need or another. Indeed, sin is often the attempt to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way. If we don't address that need in appropriate ways, we will go right on sinning. . . .

The second question is, "What happened as a result of my sin?". . .

A New Feeling

After understanding comes a new way of feeling. True confession is not just an exchange of information; it also involves entering into the pain of the person we have hurt and entering into God's pain over sin. . . . Contrition is as useful to the soul as pain is to the body.

Having said that, we must balance this with another statement: Confession is an act of grace.

Confession can safely be made only in the context of grace. Feelings of remorse are no guarantee of authentic repentance, and they can be highly destructive.

It helps to know what our tendencies are, whether we tend to beat ourselves up or let ourselves off the hook.

The apostle Paul made a distinction between two kinds of sorrow. There is what he called "godly sorrow," which is a fitting emotional response to our wrongdoing The other kind of sorrow is what Paul calls "worldly sorrow." Instead of leading to life, it produces death. . . .

A New Promise

. . . confession is not just naming what we have done in the past. It involves our intentions about the future as well. It requires a kind of promise.

As God does his work in us through the process of confession, we will feel a deep desire not to do this hurtful thing again. So we make a vow. We resolve that, with God's help, we will change. This will involve trying to set right what we did wrong, to the extent that such is possible.

The Summit: Healing Grace

The final step in confession . . . is grace. This is not just the idea of grace, but grace as a reality, being immersed in it, given life by it.