



**KING'S
CHURCH** (<http://kingschurchedinburgh.org/>)
EDINBURGH

The Suffering Substitute

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12

The State of Us

We have griefs and sorrows that we carry around with us because of the world we live in. People around us hurt us, and less directly but still significantly, governments, businesses, culture-makers; all do things – or fail to do things – that have a negative impact on us. Whether through intentional wickedness or accidental selfishness, we carry the memories of these things as sadness and bitterness and we try to live whilst crippled by their consequences.

We are also a burden to ourselves. There is no area of your life immune from sin: you were born with it in you and you do it without thinking. Even if we'd been brought up and always lived in perfect circumstances, we would still sin. It's like cancerous growths that disfigure and destroy us but which we keep feeding and encouraging, like an occupying enemy who we collaborate with. We're polluted and addicted, victims and criminals, sinners. We may experience this as guilt, shame, or weakness.

God is purer than we are, holier, more loving: He cannot abide evil. He will not ignore sin or just forget about it; if He did, the universe would have no justice. The consequences of sin are death, judgement, punishment, hell.

The song describes Jesus as isolated, rejected, ignored, and treated horrifically. Jesus and all the New Testament writers say that this song is about Him, they want us to see the crucifixion here.

Isaiah brings our sin and Christ's suffering together in a song of substitution(see *especially verses 4 to 6*). Again and again we're told that the consequences of our sinful actions were taken from us by Him. This was the fulfilment of the Old Testament

sacrificial system in which guilt offerings (*verse 10*) were offered to God by repentant sinners (*Hebrews 10:14*).

The cross is where we see that God can be loving and just, that sinners like us can be freed from our guilt and shame and fear, and be welcomed back into the arms of God, where we can be sure of God's love even as we confess our rebellion (*1 John 4:10*).

Jesus's death is followed by resurrection, making things new. After His burial (*verse 9*), He sees His many descendants made righteous (*verse 11*). Righteousness is about being in right relationship with God: forgiven and more, being at peace with Him, being like Jesus is (*2 Corinthians 5:21*).

In response to this we should...

Take your sin seriously. You don't need to hide it, pretend it's not real or that it's actually good. Hate it for the evil it is, its perversion of you and its pain for others, and its deserved punishment by God. Give it to Jesus: confess it, repent of it, let Him take it off your back and put it on His.

See the cross as the centre point of history, the most important thing. Rejoice and boast in it, rather than yourself. Whatever else is happening, however significant, focus on this above all.

Understand your life through the cross. If this is true, God doesn't owe us anything, does He?

Image of crucifixion (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim_Altarpiece) used is from the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald.

Questions:

- How did this preach help you to understand God better?
- What causes us to prioritise other issues in the world and our lives ahead of God's agenda for us?
- Isaiah 53 defines sin far more broadly than just us doing things wrong. Which aspects of the depictions of sin did you find surprising? How does having an accurate understanding of sin help us understand ourselves and the world?
- Why is God's anger a true and good part of His character? Is it the same as His love or different? If not, how is it different?

- People often assume that those who consider themselves sinners are always miserable but Isaiah 53 suggests something else. What is it about the gospel that makes us cheerful even as we confess how awful we can be?
- Which of the three responses Luke suggested do you think is the most challenging for you: taking your sin seriously, putting the cross at the centre of everything, or seeing all of God's dealings with you through the perspective of the cross (i.e. He doesn't owe you anything)?
- How would Isaiah 53 help you to explain the gospel to someone who isn't a Christian?



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