

You've heard of Marco Polo's 13th century trip to the China where he spent 17 years in the court of Kublai Khan. What you may not know is what he did when he first came before the Pagan ruler. According to legend, Marco told the story of Jesus. It is said that when Marco Polo related the events of His Passion—His betrayal, trial, scourging and crucifixion, Kublai Khan became more engrossed in the story, and more tense. When Marco Polo pronounced the words, "Then Jesus bowed his head and yielded up his spirit," Kublai Khan couldn't take it any longer. He interrupted, "What did the Christian's God do then? Did he send thousands of angels from heaven to smite and destroy those who killed his Son?" That's what anyone would expect. But what did God do? Marco answered, "He watched his beloved Son die." That is the incredible truth foretold in Isaiah 53.

Before the Father, Jesus was Executed!

We read **verses 4-12**

4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 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. 6 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.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;

He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

There was an article in Newsman a couple of months ago advertising a new book about "Why Jesus died." That sounds like a good book to come out just before the Lenten season. The article quoted John the Baptist saying about Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Then it inexplicably continues, "Many people believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins. This is not true. Jesus forgives sins, but He died for something much, much more." It then quotes Isaiah 55:7 which says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, For He will abundantly pardon," after which the author says, "Jesus did not have to die on the cross before God would forgive our sins." "Since the beginning of time, God has forgiven those who repent and turn from their transgressions."

This article implies that God just forgives us out of the goodness of His heart. He forgives

simply because He is a loving, forgiving God. No payment is needed in order for God to forgive. God doesn't need to punish anyone.

That idea is very appealing to our human nature. No one wants to admit that our sins are so black and so dreadful that it requires the death of God's Son to pay for them. And if God can simply forgive out of the goodness of His heart, then there is certainly no need for a place of punishment in hell. It also seems to be reasonable. After all God expects us to simply forgive other people who have wronged us out of the goodness of our heart. We are not allowed to exact some payment or punishment for those sins against us. He expects us to simply forgive, freely, up to 70 x 7. So wouldn't it make sense that God also simply forgives from the goodness of His heart without any payment?

It is appealing, but it is in direct contradiction to what God says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." 1 Cor. 15:3 That is the most fundamental truth that is taught in hundreds of passages in Scripture, that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins. Nowhere is it taught more clearly than in Isaiah 53. Written over 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah lays it out for us plainly and explains why Jesus died. Let's take a closer look at this amazing text.

Isaiah makes it clear that the Messiah would suffer and die, but not because of any wrong that He had done. Isaiah states in verse 9, "He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth." So why did He suffer so? "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." The Jews who crucified Him assumed that God was punishing Him for the sin of Blasphemy claiming to be the Son of God. But Isaiah goes on to squash that thought. He says, "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." Vs. 5

Even more remarkable, this was God's plan. "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." This is where our Lenten theme really comes to a head.

The Deepest Stroke that Pierced Him was the Stroke that Justice Gave.

God's justice condemned Jesus to death.

As difficult as it was, verse 7 shows Jesus willingly endured it all. "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." Jesus didn't object or fight back. He silently endure everything. Then Isaiah says, "He was cut off from the land of the living." He died as God watched. And once again Isaiah emphasizes, it was "For the transgressions of My people."

Verse 10 presents the most striking statement of all, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief." God the Father not only stood by and watched as His Son was crucified, He took an active part in bruising His Son and putting Him to death. And He was "pleased" by it. The Hebrew word means to "*To delight in, to take pleasure in, to be pleased with.*"

How can we understand that? Certainly it is not that God found pleasure in watching His Son suffer and die. He is not a sadistic monster who enjoyed watching people suffer. God is love and Jesus is His dearly beloved Son. Yet God was pleased with His Son's willing obedience and His determined love. Even more so, He was pleased with the sacrifice. He was pleased to see the penalty for all the sins of the world being paid in full. Isaiah says in verse 11, "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied." He was satisfied that the payment was complete. The propitiation was made to satisfy His justice.

Therefore, Isaiah continues, "By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,

for He shall bear their iniquities.” That makes it especially clear. We are justified, declared righteous because Jesus bore our iniquities. Ephesians 5:2 describes Jesus’ death as “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” All the sins of the world were like a stench in God’s nostrils but Jesus’ sacrifices took the stench away and replaced it with a sweet-smelling aroma. His holy and righteous anger was soothed.

The last part of verse 10 says, “When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed.” Jesus, of course, was never married or had any children, yet He would see His seed or offspring, these are His spiritual offspring. If He would see His spiritual offspring, then He has to rise from the dead. That was proof that God was satisfied with His sacrifice, as we will see on Sunday. The Father found delight in the sacrifice that justified us so that you and I can be His children forever.

That article claimed that Jesus died for something much much more than paying for our sins. What more could Jesus have accomplished than dying for our sins? The forgiveness of our sins is everything. It is that forgiveness that reconciles us to God and brings all of His blessings, both physical and spiritual. It is only by the forgiveness of sins that Heaven has been opened to us. There is nothing more that Jesus could have done for us.

This is why we call it GOOD Friday! We usually think of Good Friday as a somber day of sadness. And there is a sombreness to see the horrible suffering and death of our Saviour. Especially when we know it is our fault. We should be sad about our sins, that is what contrition is. However, if God the Father could be pleased with His Son’s Sacrifice and delight in His death because of what He accomplished, how much more shouldn’t we? When we see what Jesus has accomplished for us: that all of our sins, which separated us from God and brought His eternal punishment, have been paid for and taken away; that Heaven is our eternal home because of the sacrifice Jesus made on this day; what greater reason to rejoice on this day! And when we see the most incredible love that Jesus and His Father have for us, it is truly reason to rejoice.

Finally I would like you to consider one very profound effect Jesus’ death has on our lives. As I mentioned earlier, God asks us to simply forgive all people from the heart without exacting any payment. We find that difficult to do. However it is possible because Jesus has already made the full payment for all the sins of all people. That includes every sin that anyone does against you.

If someone hurts you in words or in actions, remember Jesus already suffered the punishment for those sins. If we are angry with them or speak harsh, biting words to them, or hold on to bitterness, we are saying, “Jesus, your death was not enough to pay for this person’s sins. I have to punish him or her myself.” No wonder Jesus says that if we do not forgive others, then God will not forgive us, for we are despising Jesus’ death on the cross.

God has forgiven us and all people. How can we do anything else? May we seek God’s forgiveness for our unwillingness to forgive others. Then we too can freely forgive one another because of the sacrifice Jesus made for us all.

So look to the cross today, see your Saviour dying for your sins. See the Father rejoicing that you have been made one with God. Rejoice in your own forgiveness and gladly forgive everyone the way God in Christ has forgiven you.

Amen