

The Death That Will End Suffering And Death
(April 10, 2020 Isaiah 53:1-6)

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Isaiah 53:1-6



In my lifetime there has never been an Easter like this.

Christians across the globe unable to physically gather.

People fearful of the future.

People suffering and dying.

But these trials make the hope we celebrate this morning – the hope of the message of Easter – even more important for us to hear.

This morning we will consider – *The **Death** That Will End Suffering And Death.*

Then on Resurrection Sunday we will consider – *The **Life** That Will End Suffering And Death.*

So this morning I want us to turn our thoughts to what is perhaps the best known passage on the cross – Isaiah 53. I want us to spend a few minutes considering the stunning truths found in the first six verses.

There we find this:

Jesus suffered and died to end all suffering and death.

Jesus suffered and died to end all suffering and death.

And this is seen in two truths:

Jesus suffered and died to end all suffering and death:

Jesus experienced suffering and death 1-3

Jesus ended suffering and death 4-6



Jesus experienced suffering and death 1-3

Jesus ended suffering and death 4-6

If you have your Bibles, please look with me at these remarkable verses.

We begin with the *first truth* that:

Jesus experienced suffering and death 1-3

Notice how Isaiah begins in verse 1:

Who has believed what we have heard?

Have you ever had someone tell you something so incredible you struggled to believe it?

On September 11, 2001 I was in an operating theatre late in the evening when a nurse walked in and said – guess what? – a plane just crashed into the one of the World Trade Centre buildings in New York.

Everyone in the operating theatre looked at each other – really?

A quarter of an hour later she walked in to say – guess what? – another plane just crashed into the second tower.

I remember thinking – how could that possibly happen? It seemed too outrageous to be true.

Isaiah knows what he is about to say is so outrageous it won't be believed.

To understand why this is so hard to believe, we have to put this section in its context.

In chapters 49-52 – God had been promising to send a Servant who would come to deal with sin and the consequences of sin – suffering and death.

Now Isaiah begins to tell us how God will do that.

If you look back at chapter 52 verse 13 – he says, this Servant will be successful – He will actually deal with sin – and crucially we will know Him because He will *be raised and lifted up*.

This is a key phrase.

In the New Testament – many passages speak of Jesus being lifted up – mainly in the crucifixion – but also in His resurrection and ascension.

While the cross and the resurrection **are** in view here – I think we are also to realise there is another association.

This combination of words – *raised and lifted up* – is only found together in the book of Isaiah. It is found four times in this book. Apart from this time, the other three times clearly refer to God Himself.

For example Isaiah 6:1:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a **high and lofty** throne (or on a throne **raised and lifted up**).

What Isaiah wants to tell us – what he knows we will find so hard to believe – is that this Servant who will come and suffer and die – will be God Himself.

The God of Isaiah 6 is also the Servant who will come and suffer and die.

I totally understand why Isaiah thought we would struggle to believe this.

The God of Isaiah 6:

The One who is high and lifted up.

The One called holy, holy, holy by Seraphim.

The One who causes the foundations to shake.

Is also the God of Isaiah 40:

The One who measures the waters in the hollow of His hand.

The One who gauges the heavens by the span of His hand.

The One who considers the nations to be a mere drop from a bucket.

The One who was before time and after time.

The One who sustains all things.

The One who calls every star by name.

The One who will not share His glory with another.

But, what Isaiah wants us to know is that He is **also** the God of Isaiah 52 and 53:

The One who is disfigured and barely recognisable.

The One who is despised and rejected.

The One who is pierced for our rebellion.

When I think about the cross and the One dying on the cross – it is still even today – so hard for me to wrap my mind around the truth that the One who suffered and died is the One who Created everything.

It is so preposterous – but I believe it because the Bible teaches it is true and God says it is the only way He can deal with sin.

This is outrageous love. Love and grace that moved God Himself to come into our fallen messed up world and suffer and die in the place of the ones who turned against Him and ruined the world in the first place.

Why would God do this? Why not send a prophet – an angel – anyone else?

Because what is implied in this passage and then made crystal clear in the New Testament is that for the Servant to accomplish His task of salvation – He has to have two qualities.

First, He has to be fully human – a flesh and blood man. He has to be descendant of Adam to redeem the children of Adam. He has to enter the fallen creation as a man. No angel could do that.

And second, He has to be one who is without sin. Only one without sin can pay the penalty of sin. In chapter Isaiah 43:27 we see that Adam sinned and every mediator God sent since that time sinned. No mere man can do it.

If God is going to save His people – He only has one option – **He** must humble Himself and become man and suffer in our place.

I have been a Christian for 36 years – I know this truth – I love this truth – I enjoy celebrating it every Easter – and yet I still struggle to comprehend a love like this.

How could the Creator humble Himself like this?

How can the Creator allow Himself to suffer and die at the hands of the Creation?

How is it even possible that God can suffer?

How is it even possible that God can die?

That is why Isaiah says it is shocking. It is astonishing. Who will believe it?

But it is true – it is what we celebrate this morning.

Verses 1 and 2:

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground.

God **did** become man. The Word became flesh. He grew up. He didn't look like some other-worldly God-man – He looked just like us.

From the dry ground of Nazareth – this young plant sprang up. But He was just like us.

This was the carpenter Joseph's son – the villagers knew His mother and brothers.

How could this one be the Servant?

He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him.

This is not meant to convey that Jesus was ugly or unimpressive – deformed nose, crooked back, protruding eye.

I think this means He was *entirely unremarkable* – He was *ordinary*.

If we lined up fifty men and said – pick out the Messiah – we would probably be like Samuel in 1 Samuel 16 – and look for the tall, handsome, well-muscled guy – that one has to be the Messiah.

If we were transported back to first century Israel, and wandered the streets and Jesus walked past us – I doubt we would recognize Him for who He was.

This verse indicates that He was probably quite commonplace to look at. You wouldn't pick Him out of a crowd.

Nothing about His physical appearance screamed – Messiah!

He was a man in every sense.

But that is precisely the point – He was fully man – and as a man He did something He could not do if He stayed in heaven – He experienced the full horror of this fallen world.

Verse 3:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him.

He was despised and rejected. Men turned from Him. He was not who they expected or wanted.

He was not valued.

Then notice – this statement.

He was a man of suffering who knew what sickness was.

Now this is actually a *very* controversial verse.

Our translation the CSB says – he *knew* what sickness was.

Knew here is the same word the Bible uses when it says – Adam knew Eve – Adam was intimate with Eve.

The idea is that Jesus didn't just know about sickness – He knew sickness intimately. He actually experienced sickness.

Other translations take a different route – the ESB says:

He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

The idea behind this translation is that what Jesus knew was grief. He experienced loss such as when Lazarus died.

He lived among a people who know grief and pain.

While translation this word grief or pain is possible – this world usually means sickness – and it is the word in verse 4 – He himself bore our sicknesses.

So why do some translate it grief or pain when the context and usual translation would be sickness?

The answer has to do with a theological question.

The question is this – as the God-man – did Jesus know sickness and infirmity by experiencing it – or did He know grief and pain because He lived among those who became sick and suffered?

This is a difficult question to answer and some very godly men and women have landed on different sides here.

For example – if I asked this question.

If COVID 19 had arisen 2000 years ago – could Jesus have become ill from this virus?

What do you think?

As he grew up, did Jesus suffer from colds and measles and vomiting bugs? Did He suffer in the ways you and I suffer?

This is actually a very tough question.

Many in history have said – **no** Jesus understood illness but He Himself never became ill.

Athanasius of Alexandria argued:

How could He fall sick who had healed others? ... Should He who healed the bodies of others neglect to keep His own in health?

Athanasius argues that everyone Jesus touched was healed of disease – so how could disease affect Him? If a virus entered Jesus – His healing power would immediately destroy it.

But, perhaps the more significant argument is theological. George Smeaton in his classic work *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* stated:

[Jesus] saw no corruption, either living or dead – for sickness or disease could not, as a personal quality attach to the sinless One ... Disease could not touch Him, because He did not come within the power of sin in the world; and hence we never read of His contracting any distemper or disease like other men.

Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

Do not think that our Lord Jesus was actually diseased Probably there was no man in whom there was less tendency to natural disease than in him. His pure and blessed body was not subject to the diseases which are brought upon men through sin being in them.

In other words – since disease is a consequence of sin – and because Jesus was sinless – He could not be affected by disease. Only fallen men and women can become ill.

That is one side of the argument.

However, some pretty good theologians answered – **yes** Jesus could and did become ill.

Experiencing illness is part of being human.

The great Confessions of the faith seem to say this.

The *Belgic Confession* in the section on “The Incarnation of Jesus Christ,” declares that God’s “only-begotten and eternal Son ... took upon Him the form of a servant, and became like unto man, really assuming the true human nature, **with all its infirmities**, sin excepted.”

The Westminster Confession says that Christ “took upon Him man’s nature, with all the essential properties, **and common infirmities** thereof, yet without sin”

The idea is that to become man meant He shared our infirmities – sickness, injury, pain and even death.

We know that Jesus hungered and thirsted.

We know He experienced pain, deprivation, abuse, beatings, rejection.

He experienced the horrors of our fallen world.

Hebrews 2:17 says:

Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in **every** way.

Look, who am I to disagree with Spurgeon – but it seems to me that Jesus **did** experience the full gamut of humanity – including sickness.

If He fell over as a boy He scraped His knee and it bled. If He was out by the Sea of Galilee too long He got sunburned. If He missed a meal He was hungry. If He caught a cold virus He became ill.

Nothing in Scripture indicates that the people of Nazareth thought of Jesus as the invulnerable boy – the one who never got hurt or became sick. They viewed Him as entirely ordinary.

It seems to me that Jesus could have chosen to heal Himself – but He understood that to choose humanity was to choose suffering and sickness. Just as He could have avoided death – He could have avoided sickness – but He chose to humble Himself and experience full humanity.

And yes Jesus was sinless – but don’t make the mistake of saying that each instance of sickness has to be related to some specific sin.

No – sickness and death came into the world because of Adam’s sin. Once they were in the world you can become ill and die without it being related to any specific sin.

When your baby dies – when your uncle gets cancer – don’t look for some specific sin in someone as the cause. No Adam’s sin is the cause.

That is why Jesus becoming man – becoming a descendant of Adam – meant He would become sick and suffer and die even though He was without sin.

Look, if you argue a holy being can't suffer the effects of sin such illness – then surely He can't suffer the ultimate effect of sin – death – but on this day of all days we know that Jesus died.

So, I personally believe Jesus experienced not just death but the full spectrum of suffering. He need not have – but He chose to.

Why? Hebrews 4:15 tells us why:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in **every** way as we are, yet without sin.

This doesn't mean Jesus experienced every single horror of this world. He didn't experience drug addiction or dying from cancer.

But He did experience all the categories of suffering – pain, sickness, loss, hunger, temptation.

Why this is important is that whatever your suffering is – whatever you are going through – Jesus sympathises. He knows what you are going through.

He experienced the death of a friend – Lazarus.

He experienced sickness.

He Himself felt pain and grief and loss.

He knows what it is like to be fully human.

Now even if I am wrong, even if all Jesus did was live among the illness and pain in of our world – choosing to do that is still incredible.

Frederick Dale Bruner put it this way: “We sing ‘Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God wouldst die for me.’ But we can also sing, ‘Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God wouldst cry with me.’”

So no matter how you answer the question – ultimately all agree – Jesus knew suffering and death.

One way or another: **Jesus experienced suffering and death.**

He sympathises with us.

That would be impressive enough – but He did not stop there. He went the next step.

We find this in our *second truth*:

Jesus ended suffering and death.

Because of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday – a day is coming when there will be no more suffering and no more death.

Verses 4-6:

Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all.

When Adam sinned – God told Him the consequences of his rebellion.

From this time forward you will deal with thorns and thistles, pain and suffering, a world where your body will get infected, grow old and finally die.

Adam was sent out of Eden. He walked from a perfect world into a fallen world.

It is hard to imagine how devastating that would be. And cherubim were stationed there with flaming swords so he could not return.

His body aged and grew ill.

Viruses now caused him to become sick.

And it was not just him who suffered.

One of his sons killed the other.

He watched his beloved Eve grow old – he may even have watched her die.

He may well have seen grandchildren and great grandchildren die.

Sin unleashed the horror of suffering and death.

Every man, woman and child ever born came into a world where they would feel pain, become injured, experience illness and finally die.

Death became an inevitable part of life.

Read Genesis 5 – a list of the descendants of Adam – and this list has one thing in common. They lived – so many years – and then they died. We all die.

We are born into a world infected by Adam's sin and we inherited his sin nature and we show that in the way we live.

Since suffering and death were caused by sin – the only way to remove suffering and death is to remove sin – forever.

But you and I can't even remove sin from our lives for a day – an hour.

Our thoughts naturally run to sin. Our motives are impure. Even when we sleep we sin.

We can't control our sin let alone pay for our sin.

And the wages of sin is death.

The illnesses and infirmities of life finally lead to death – physical death and then eternal spiritual death – the second death.

This is the inevitable end for each of us – **unless** sin can be dealt with.

I don't know if or when some scientists and virologists will come up with a cure or a vaccine for COVID 19.

But I do know that no scientist, politician, religious leader – no one can come up with a cure for our real problem – sin.

But what we can't do – God can.

He dealt with sin by bearing the consequences of sin. The full wrath of God – the punishment we so rightly deserve was born by Jesus on the cross.

He himself bore our sicknesses.
He carried our pains.
He was pierced because of our rebellion.
He was crushed because of our iniquities.

Just as Jesus chose to experience suffering and death – He chose to lay down His life to end suffering and death.

The punishment I deserve fell on Him.

And because of that.

I receive peace.
I am healed by His wounds.

How does this happen? How can God pay for my sins?

How is that just? How is that fair?

How can Jesus die on the cross 2000 years ago and the sins I commit today get washed away?

I don't pretend to understand every aspect of how this can happen. There are mysteries here we can only dimly penetrate.

Let me share my imperfect understanding. I think that here we come to the glory of Christianity. The glory of the cross. The heart of Christianity.

If this doesn't thrill your soul – you don't understand this day.

No other religion or philosophy has a way of dealing with sin against a holy God. *Only* Christianity answers the great question of how sin is dealt with.

The key to dealing with sin is our **union** with Jesus. Scripture teaches that when we come to Christ – we become united with Jesus *forever*. We are *in* Him – He is *in* us.

What happens to Him happens to us.

In my mind – I picture myself being placed inside Jesus – covered by Jesus. This means that when the wrath of God falls on Jesus – **my** sin is punished. When Jesus hung on the cross – I hung there in Him. As His blood was poured out – as His life was given up – my sin was paid for.

As He was beaten – by His stripes – I am healed.

Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

As Jesus was crucified – I was crucified.

Romans 6:6:

For we know that our old self was crucified with him.

As the punishment for my sin fell on Jesus – I was cleansed.

1 Peter 2:24:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

Because I was in Christ – in this way the wrath of God was poured out on me – and the justice of God was fully satisfied – paid in full.

This is the heart of the gospel. This is the glory of Good Friday.

Every one of us has sinned against a holy God. We have turned from him. We have lusted and coveted and lied.

We are sheep who have gone astray and turned to our own way.

And the wages of sin is death. On our own – it will be **our** blood – **our** life which will pay the penalty for your sins.

But if you are in Christ – **His** blood – **His** life – **His** death on the cross – avails for your sin.

When I read these verses – I think of a painting by Rembrandt – *The Raising of the Cross*.

But what is remarkable about this painting is that Rembrandt put himself in the painting because he knew – Jesus died for his transgressions. **He** nailed Jesus to the cross. **He** killed Him.

But in this – Jesus – the innocent One – pays for the sins of His people.

I nailed Jesus to the cross.

It is my sin not His that put Him there.

But in His death – I am washed and made free.

How awesome is that? How unbelievable is that?

Philippians 2:6–8:

Christ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— **even to death on a cross**.

He experienced the fullness of humanity – even to death on a cross.

Today, every Christian has their sin forgiven – which means an end to suffering and death.

But we ask – since Jesus has died and the penalty has been paid – if Jesus has already ended suffering and death – why is there still suffering and death?

Suffering and death are already defeated – but their final demise awaits.

I think of it like this.

Jesus was holy and sinless – but He came into this fallen world and He suffered, He became ill and He died.

Because I am in Jesus, I have His holiness and sinlessness – but I still live in this fallen world and so I suffer, I become ill and I will die.

While this world is fallen – there are consequences.

It is only when this fallen world is renewed, only when my fallen body is glorified that suffering and death will finally end.

What is God waiting for? Why doesn't He end it today?

Jesus is waiting until every last one of His sheep is gathered – it is then He will remove every last speck of sin and every last effect of sin.

That day is coming.

A day when there will be no malaria, no coronaviruses, no cancer, no old age, no death – no tears, no pain, no suffering.

A day of incredible rejoicing – Sin is banished, death is defeated and we will live forever.

The cross paid for it.

The empty tomb guarantees it.

And every day Christians rejoice at this truth.

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Main Point: Jesus suffered and died to end all suffering and death.

General Questions:

1. Why is the fact that God would suffer and die for sinners so hard to believe?
2. Why was Jesus rejected and devalued by those He came to save?
3. While there is no definitive answer – do you think Jesus actually experienced sickness or just empathised with the sick? Does it matter?
4. How did Jesus end suffering and death?
5. If Jesus paid the penalty 2000 years ago – why is there still suffering and death today?
6. How is the cross the most amazing example of love?

Application Questions:

1. Why is it so important to focus on the hope of the cross during times of trials?
2. How does it help in times of trial to know Jesus suffered in His humanity?
3. How does the cross remind you of the love of God for you in tough times?
4. How can you use the trials of these days to share about the cross?
5. What is your favourite passage on the cross and why?
6. What is your favourite song about the cross and why?