

“Jesus the Suffering Servant”

Jesus hangs upon the cross of Calvary – and above Him is a sign for all to read – “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. “Jesus” – that is, “the Lord saves.” “Nazareth” – whose root word had “root” in it – as in, the “root” of Jesse. “King” – you know, “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey.”

How can the crowds gathered at the cross, and those streaming by – not see it? They don’t BEHOLD this One hanging on the cross – they don’t understand that this Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

Isaiah the prophet was so clear. He writes as if he were standing at the foot of the cross. Hundreds of years away – he sees it – he BEHOLDS Jesus – the Suffering Servant. So, why don’t THEY?

So, why don’t WE? Sure, we confess that this Jesus of Nazareth – this man being crucified is the Christ – the Savior. And yet, there is so much that we do not BEHOLD. So that we might “see” and “understand” – the prophet Isaiah speaks to God’s children, once again.

Tonight, Isaiah’s portrait of the Suffering Servant begins with – “Behold, my servant shall act wisely; He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” Jesus said that when He was lifted up, He would draw all people to Himself – but when lifted up on the cross, many, including His disciples, were scattered.

Being lifted up on a cross does not look “wise” at all. We are “astonished” at the sight, as Isaiah says – “His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance ...” What looks in-humane is precisely the Son of God’s service for all humanity.

He’s disfigured – having been slapped and punched and flogged – blood dripping from His body. Isaiah told us that He “shall sprinkle many nations” (the same word used for the sprinkling of the blood from the sacrifices of atonement) sprinkling the altar, the priests, the people. The Suffering Servant sprinkles you – to make atonement for you.

And yet, many do not see what has been told them, nor understand what they have heard.

“Who has believed what he has heard from us?” Isaiah says. Who believed that this baby laid in a manger would be the One of whom Isaiah spoke – that this young boy in the temple is the Suffering Servant?

“He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him.” He was so ordinary looking – and yet – “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces ...”

Those who passed by on their way to worship in Jerusalem saw this awful sight alongside the road – but all they saw was three men getting what they deserved. This “King of the Jews” was to them a criminal – One stricken, smitten and afflicted by God Himself.

What they do not see – and what we must not miss – is that Jesus hangs there for us, for our salvation. He bears in His body our griefs, our sorrows. He is wounded for our transgressions – for our sexual immorality, our wicked words, our greedy hearts. For us – He is despised, rejected, chastised – all so that we might have peace.

Oppressed, afflicted, led to slaughter – stricken for the transgression of His people, Isaiah says – “yet He opened not His mouth.” He had opened His mouth previously – asking the Father to take this cup from Him (this Passion, this suffering and death). Jesus knew what lay ahead – and yet He prayed – “not my will, but yours be done.”

Now is the time for silence – for the Father’s will to be done. No objections – no cries of, “not fair” – no words which might get in the way of the Father’s will. You know the Father’s will, don’t you? He desires that “all would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” – that all would see Jesus, the Suffering Servant, as their Savior.

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him; He has put Him to grief ...” This is hard to hear, and understand. It was THE FATHER’S WILL to crush Jesus? That sounds like an abusive Father to us – but He is not – He is a loving Father.

There is so much talk about “justice” today – but in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – we see true justice. The wages of sin is death. Sinners must bear the wrath of God – they must suffer the punishment due their transgressions. Sin doesn’t just “go away” – vanish, as if it is nothing. God doesn’t change His mind – no, His Word remains true – and He remains true to His Word.

Sin must be dealt with. Sin must be atoned for. God’s justice demands a death for sin. And the Father’s love sets forth His Son, “for you.” Instead of pouring out His wrath and punishment on you – He pours it out on His beloved Son. It is His will to crush His dearest treasure – in order to save you.

He who “poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors” – He who bore the sin of the world – Jesus, the Suffering Servant – even now, “makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews – sits now at the right hand of God the Father Almighty – interceding on your behalf. “Father, forgive them,” He prays. Father, I have taken all their sin as my own – I suffered for them – my blood was shed for them – my life given for them.

Dearly beloved, God grant you to “see” and “understand” that when Jesus says “It is finished” – that means it is finished “for you.” Your sin is atoned for – redemption is won – forgiveness, life and salvation is yours – in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.