

"Pierced for our transgressions"

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] Thanks a lot, David, for reading. Good morning, St. Silas. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the rector here, the senior pastor.

It's great to have you here. If you're in the building, if you're at home watching the live stream, it's great you could join us. I hope you can stay connected with us as we just spend some time now looking together at this bit of the Bible.

And I'm just going to pray for us as we get going, just asking for God's help as we turn to his word. So let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this portion of your word.

And I pray that you will be with every one of us, that spiritually you will renew us this morning through this revelation of who you are and of what your plans are, and that you will help us to respond rightly to you.

For Jesus' name's sake, amen. Well, we're in this series at St. Silas looking at these songs or poems from the prophet Isaiah.

[1 : 0 7] They were first spoken by Isaiah about 700 BC, so about 700 years before Jesus came. And the songs reached their pinnacle this morning.

This is the fourth one. And this is the passage, perhaps more than any other in the Old Testament, that the New Testament writers keep coming back to as they explain who Jesus is and what he did.

So the four servant songs tell us about this unique, mysterious figure central to God's plans who will come in human history. And the New Testament writers clearly identify for us that these prophecies are fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth.

And the servants coming is foretold by Isaiah at the darkest time in the history of God's people. They were the people that God had rescued.

God had made a promise that these people, through them, all the nations of the world will be blessed. So the hopes of humanity, having turned away from God and our relationship with God having been broken, are kind of pinned on the fortunes of his people and how they get on.

[2 : 1 6] And they've rejected God repeatedly so that they end up in exile from the promised land. And if you're reading Bible history or you're looking at the history of humans dealing with God, at that point, it's despair because you're left thinking, how on earth is God ever going to be able to keep his promise that there will be a people who relate rightly to him?

When this is a God who is just, so he punishes sin, he punishes wrongdoing. And we fall so short of his standards.

I preached on this passage about seven or eight years ago in a church, and I did quite a lot of work on trying to justify the idea that God would punish wrongdoing because I felt at that time that the mood was very much kind of, that we were very squeamish about that, very uneasy at the idea that there's a God who would punish wrongdoing.

I think that now in our culture, we're much more aware of the need for justice and the need for wrongdoing to be brought into the light and punished.

We've seen that this year with the Black Lives Matter movement, the incredible visceral anger about George Floyd's death in America and this sense of real rage about injustice.

[3 : 42] We've seen it with the Me Too movement and the way that we've had to bring into the light ways that women have been mistreated. And we see that our world is crying out for justice.

And I hope that helps us recognize that for there to be a God who is loving and who is light, so he stands for goodness and stands against evil and wickedness, he has to punish wrongdoing in our world.

We long for that. We yearn for justice. And the message of the Scriptures is that God is there and he is deeply concerned and he will uphold his righteousness by punishing wrong.

The problem for all of us is that the Scriptures are clear that none of us can stand before God and his moral purity. We've all fallen short.

And in the language of Romans chapter 3, verse 19, it says about that it's referring to the law of God here, the Old Testament law that displayed his character.

[4 : 44] It says, We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. We're silenced before his moral law.

We can't justify ourselves. And Isaiah put it like this. He said, There is no peace for the wicked. It's a sentence that has come into kind of folklore in our language today, but it's from the prophet Isaiah.

There is no peace for the wicked. In other words, we cannot stand before God and be given peace with him the way that we've lived. But for any of us who are willing to recognize that we carry around in our lives an element of guilt for the way that we've lived, the things that we've thought, said, and done, that there are past mistakes and regrets and shame, for any of us in that position, willing to accept that, the servant songs speak right into our souls as we hear of God's solution to that.

Now, over the last few weeks, each of the servant songs, if you've been with us, has exposed and revealed something new and different about this servant. So in the first servant song, in Isaiah 42, we learn that God is revealing this servant in history and through him, he will establish justice in the world.

And with that justice comes a knowledge of God, that the world will come to know God through this servant. Then in the second song, we heard God say to the servant that he is so magnificent in fulfilling God's plan, it wouldn't be enough for him just to save Israel.

[6 : 27] He'll save people from every nation of the world. God wants to save the world through this servant. And then last week, in the third servant song, we were introduced to the awful suffering that this servant's gonna have to endure.

as he said, I offer my back to those who beat me and my beard to those who pluck it out. And he doesn't hide his face from those who spit at him. And as we're looking at these songs in progression, we're left thinking, there's real mystery here.

How are these things gonna fit together? There's tension. And then we get the revelation of this fourth song. Now the song's got five verses.

You know, if we were thinking about a song today, we might think about it having verses. And it's a bit confusing because in the Bible, every sentence is kind of a verse. So we call the verses stanzas, just to distinguish them.

So there's five stanzas, and I'm just gonna work through them one by one this morning. So the first one, the first stanza, point one, is the servant's unlikely success.

[7 : 32] I'll hopefully have that on the screen. The servant's unlikely success. And the success is clear in verse 13, the very start. So if you're at home and you haven't got a Bible, do grab one or look at biblegateway.com.

If you're here, do look on the sheets. Verse 13, where God tells us the end from the beginning. He tells us how this is gonna play out. He says, See, my servant will act wisely.

In other words, he will prosper. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. So that's well and good. And yet it's desperately unlikely when we see what God says next about the servant.

Verse 14, There were many who were appalled at him. His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.

And you wonder, how could this be talking about the same person? What would we expect a life to look like that God is prospering and God is working through? And we might expect even in our own lives that if God is gonna do that in our lives, it's gonna feel great and comfortable.

[8 : 41] And people will look at it and say, That's the one God's blessing. But no, people don't want to look at this servant. And yet, even though he is like that, his appearance, his form marred beyond human likeness.

I mean, it's an awful description, isn't it? You see sometimes descriptions of people have been so badly beaten they can't be recognized. But here, it's not just that people are asking, Who was this?

They're asking, What was this? As they look at the servant. And yet, verse 15, that same servant will sprinkle many nations. Now, that language of sprinkling is that he'll make them clean.

This is the one God will use to bring people back to him. And at the same time, look on in verse 15, it says, Kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For what they were not told, they will see. And what they have not heard, they will understand. Now, Isaiah told us earlier that his ministry, God had said to him that his time would be a time of speaking God's word to people and they're not going to understand.

[9 : 55] But when this servant is revealed to the world, there's this awestruck silence as people realize the one who seems so rejected is the one God will use to save them.

His work will make people clean. It's astonishingly unlikely. So why are people so appalled at him? Well, that's our second point. The second stanza, the servant's tragic rejection, and that's in verses 1 to 3.

It starts with the reassurance again that this is the one that God has chosen. He says, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? The people have been praying that God's mighty arm will save them.

They've said, awake, awake. Awake, awake, arm of the Lord. Clothe yourself with strength. And now we hear God sending his mighty arm to save them.

What is the arm? He grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground. In other words, there is vulnerability in this mighty arm of God.

[11 : 08] It's weak. And then he lives the kind of life that we would normally think of as abject failure. Verse 2, he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.

Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind. A man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces.

He was despised and we held him in low esteem. Twice there, we're told he was despised. Now what don't we despise? We're drawn in life to good looks, aren't we?

Things that look good. And you might be somebody listening who has been able to build your life on that. You're a good-looking person who has sailed through life because of your good looks and you've built your life on that.

Lots of the rest of us who don't have that, we seem to spend quite a lot of our lives trying to do something good-looking. It's as though we know we physically don't kind of, we're not going to go around that route, but we spend a lot of our life aiming at something that through a degree of success in life at something, there's something attractive that we have done in our lives that people can look on and be attracted to.

[12 : 27] And yet here with this servant, there was nothing like that. Instead, it is a scene so ugly, people just want to look away, can't process it.

And we think about Jesus in his ministry. His family going to look for him because they're concerned that he's out of his mind. And him, before the religious leaders, and them saying it's because he's demon-possessed that he can drive out demons.

And the locals in Nazareth, the town he grew up in, when he warns them not to reject him as a prophet, they drive him out and they want to throw him off a cliff. And today, the reaction to Jesus is not so dissimilar, is it?

There aren't many things today that are kind of off-topic in conversation, but when you speak about Jesus, you see people kind of shrink back. Because of the awkwardness of that.

And plenty of people wonder, if he really was the son of God, making God known to us, wouldn't that be a bit more obvious?

[13 : 38] You know, it was a long time ago. He died a criminal's death. He was clearly misunderstood. I'm not convinced. And yet, Isaiah says, 700 years before, that that kind of reaction to the servant is exactly what will happen.

That's what we should expect. And it's deeply encouraging, I think, that the signposts that God put into human history about his servant are as obvious as this.

And when you read this and think, how could Jesus not be the promised one when it was so clear, promised, 700 years before he came, it's as though when he finally comes and lives the life Jesus lived, his life casts a shadow back through human history that fits the outline depicted here in the servant songs perfectly.

But by now, in the song, we should be asking ourselves, why? Why would the one that God chooses to save the world live a life so despised and rejected and full of sorrow and suffering?

And that brings us to the third stanza, the servant's breathtaking substitution. Verse 4 begins with this word, surely, and it's like this take your breath away moment of realization.

[15 : 06] Ah, that's it. I get it now. I get it now. What is it? Have a look. Verse 4, surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering.

Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds, we are healed. So we heard the word suffering used about him already in verse 3, this man of sorrows, man of suffering.

Now we hear the sorrow that surrounded him was our sorrow, our suffering. And it's such strong, visible language, isn't it, of guilt and sorrow that verse 4, he took it up because sorrow and sickness weigh us down, don't they?

It weighs you down. Don't you sometimes feel weighed down? That you've got this burden of all that's wrong in your life, all that's wrong in your own heart, all that's wrong in the world that we live in.

- [16 : 31] And here the servant takes the guilt and the sickness, the spiritual sickness and the sorrow and he lifts it off our back and he puts it on his own back as he heads up the hill to die on the cross.

Verses 4 and 5, they're clear as a bell. Substitution. This servant, he lived the life that we should have lived and then he goes and dies the death we should have died.

There's a Christian writer, John Stott, and he wrote how the essence of sin is substitution. Sin is us putting ourselves in God's place in our lives that we don't want to let God make up his mind what's right and wrong in our lives.

We're determined to make up our own mind what's right and wrong in our lives. That's the essence of sin, substitution. And so it was necessary that salvation would be about substitution as well.

That having taken God's place, God would come and take our place and die on the cross. So just look at verses 4 and 5 and let me invite you just to use these verses to think about the cross and ask three questions.

- [17 : 52] What do we bring? What does Jesus experience? And what do we leave with? Have a look at verses 4 and 5. Just answer those questions for yourself. What do we bring?

What does Jesus experience? What do we leave with? What do we leave with? What do we leave with? We come to Jesus at the cross and we bring pain and suffering and verse 5, transgression and iniquity, having gone against God's moral standards.

What does Jesus endure for us? Well, he's struck down, verse 4, stricken by God, afflicted. Verse 5, he's pierced and crushed and punished and wounded.

And then look at what we leave with. Verse 5, peace and healing. Everything we could ever need and long for, healing and peace.

And it's for anyone, anyone at all. Verse 6 makes that clear. Just have a look. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way.

- [19 : 31] And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. So these are intensely personal words.

It's as though when Jesus died on the cross, a great funnel was placed above his head. And all of the guilt that we carry for the ways we've treated God and each other was placed on him.

And he was punished in our place for us. The book Pilgrim's Progress was written a few hundred years ago.

It's old language. But John Bunyan, who wrote it, I think it's still the second best-selling book in the English language after the Bible. He describes the journey of being a Christian as an actual journey.

There's a man Christian in the story. And it's an allegory as Christian goes through life to get to heaven, to get to glory. And it begins with John Bunyan describing himself dreaming of this man Christian.

- [20 : 35] And the great burden the man has is the universal burden. So let me read it for you. He says, I laid me down in that place to sleep, and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back.

I looked and saw him open the book and read therein. And as he read, he wept and trembled. And not being able longer to contain, he break out with a lamentable cry, saying, what shall I do?

Well, of course, the book he's reading is the Bible, and the burden on his back is his guilt. And there's no point ignoring the book, because the book is true. It's telling us the truth from God about ourselves.

The book assures us that that burden is real, and we all carry it. So how do you get rid of the burden? Well, he goes on this journey, and he comes to the cross, and it's described like this.

He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and little below in the bottom, a tomb. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back and began to tumble, and so continued to do so until it came to the mouth of the tomb, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

[22 : 05] That's the offer in verses 4 to 6, of not even seeing ever again one's guilt and shame. It's all taken as Jesus bears it in our place for us.

And the cost on him to offer that to you and me is described in more detail in the fourth stanza. So that's the servant's heartbreaking sacrifice in verses 7 to 9.

So look at what he endures in verse 7. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent.

So he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living.

For the transgression of my people, he was punished. So it's now the lynching of an innocent man being described. And we see in the Gospels Jesus fulfilling this as he heads to the cross.

[23 : 09] And these false accusations are driven at him in a corrupt trial. And he has the dignity to stay quiet, to fulfill what's been written about him.

And we see him consciously fulfilling this. As they left him overnight in the hands of the guards who bullied him. As they blindfolded him and hit him and said, prophesy, who struck you?

And then they nailed him to the cross to satisfy the baying crowd. And we hear early on in Luke's Gospel, Jesus reading from an earlier bit of Isaiah.

And he's in the synagogue and he reads it and he sits down and he says, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. I wonder what do you think Jesus would have thought when he was reading his Bible and he got to chapter 53 in the scroll of Isaiah.

When he knew that this was his life's work. That he would have to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. Beaten beyond recognition. So why did he endure it?

[24 : 24] Because of love. The false servant song is a love song, isn't it? Love for his father in heaven. And love for the people who he saves.

Moved by a love willing to do whatever was required. To save a people and bring us to himself. This is what love looked like for him. This is what it required.

To take the sorrows from our shoulders and carry them away for us. So we get to our fifth stanza. And it's the servant's fitting reward.

The servant's fitting reward. God is so delighted with his servant that he promises life beyond the grave. In verse 10.

Just have a look. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin. He will see his offspring and prolong his days.

[25 : 23] And the will of God will prosper in his hand. So you see what the people are described as whom he dies for. In verse 6. Who are we?

We're sheep that have wandered astray. We are lost in danger and frightened. And then in verse 10. We are children of the living God.

The servant's reward is to see us with him and live forever. It says in verse 11. After the suffering of his soul. He will see the light of life and be satisfied.

And look at the reason for the reward in verse 12. So there's language of victory. I will give him a portion among the great. And he will divide the spoils with the strong. Because he poured out his life unto death.

And was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many. And made intercession for the transgressors. That he was willing to stand with sinners.

[26 : 24] To die for sinners. To pray for sinners. Means God gives him this great reward of glory forever. And part of that reward.

Is the people who will be with him. In life forever. Even for the first hearers. God had woven into their dealings with him.

A sacrificial system. And on the day of atonement once a year. Two goats were brought into the temple. Before a priest. And the priest would. One of the goats is sacrificed.

As a sin offering. And the other. The scapegoat is driven away. To take the sin of the people away. And here we're seeing. That these pictures.

Were fulfilled. In Jesus coming. He is the one. Who all these offerings point to. That make them possible. As he's this substitute sacrifice.

[27 : 22] Sin offering. That people can come trust in him. And their sin is laid on him. And they stand before God justified. Verse 11 says. He justifies many.

That is that we stand before God approved. And right with him. So folks. What will we do. With the servant of Isaiah 53. This morning. First.

Could you give him your guilt. Could you hand it to him. If you've never before today. Turn to God. Trust in Jesus.

God's suffering servant. Could I urge you to do that today. Today would be a great day. To do that. To recognize that you've wandered from God. That we've all done that. And consider the offer this song makes to you.

To come to the cross. Weighed down by guilt. And sick from the world's brokenness. And hand it over to him. To bear it for you.

[28 : 21] Punished in your place. So that you can take from him. Healing. And peace. So give him your guilt.

Secondly. Know who you are. That something this costly. Something this beautiful. Has been done for you. And for my money.

If you were ever to give up. On being a Christian. There is nothing on offer. Anywhere else in the world. That could replace this. To live your life knowing that God loves you.

In this way. That he sent his servant. On this mission. So that he could find you. Gone astray. And bring you back to him.

As a child of the living God. What security. To know who you are. And thirdly. Would we fall at his feet.

[29 : 19] Fall at his feet in worship. Willing to lay down our lives. Gladly. For the praise of his name. In that book again.

Pilgrim's Progress. When Christian. Sees his guilt taken away at the cross. He sings a song. It goes like this. Thus far did I come laden with my sin.

Nor could I ease the grief that I was in. Till I came here. What a place is this. Must here be the beginning of my bliss. Must hear the burden fall from off my back.

Must hear the strings that bound it to me crack. Blessed cross. Blessed tomb. Blessed rather be the man. That there was put to shame for me.

Blessed be the man that there was put to shame for me. And the worship we can give him is gladly to live our lives. That he would be spoken well of.

[30 : 21] And blessed. As Isaac Watts wrote in the hymn. Were the whole realm of nature mine. That were an offering far too small. Love so amazing.

So divine. Demands my soul. My life. My all. Amen. We're going to have another song now.

A chance to reflect on these words. Of the servant song. So I'd invite you to stand for that. You can sit if you prefer. But if you'd like to stand.

Beacon Matthew will lead us in that song. And then I'll lead us in a prayer of response as well. An opportunity to confess our sins. And to thank God for the forgiveness.

Offered from his servant. So let's stand if you'd like to. Thank you.