

Christmas Redemption

Isaiah 53

This Christmas season we trace this theme of Jesus' royal nobility.

This morning we consider how our King suffers to redeem His people. This afternoon we consider our King was born to be worshipped by His people. Next Sunday we consider our King rules in peace and glory now and forevermore.

Matthew announces to us the birth of the King:

*"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, **"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"** For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."* (Matthew 2:1-3 *ESV*)

We miss the Christmas story if we think of it as a sentimental tale of a virgin giving birth to a baby in a smelly stable in Bethlehem. Those details are important, but not central. **What is central is the identity of the baby . . .** His divine nature, His royal lineage, His eternal purpose, His sovereign position among the kings of the earth. **On that day the King of all Kings was born.**

Keep in mind that Jesus was not made king by some human power. Jesus was born King by right of His divine Person.

He merits the authority that He claims as King.

He merits kingship by His Sovereign Person as the eternal God who everything that exists . . .

He merits kingship by His Sovereign ownership of the material world . . .

He merits kingship by His almighty power . . .

He merits kingship by His flawless righteousness . . .

He merits kingship by His unsearchable wisdom . . .

He merits kingship by His eternal glory.

"Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah" (Psalm 24:8-10 *ESV*)

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is "Joy to the World". I love this song for many reasons, but one reason is that it presses the kingship of Jesus against every soul. Isaac Watts actually did not write these verses to be a Christmas carol.

He wrote it as a poem that commented upon Psalm 98. **Psalm 98 is a psalm that exults in the LORD who comes to judge the earth with righteousness and truth.**

As an aside, much of the church did not appreciate Isaac Watts in 1719 when he wrote this verse. Watts noticed a certain lack of emotion among the congregants who participated in church music. (Can you imagine that!). He hated this monotonous and dull kind of singing and playing as it did not reflect the worth of God in the church. Isaac's dad challenged him to do something about this, and so Isaac began to write new songs for the church to sing. Watts' hymns severely disrupted the cultural traditions of his time and **some accused him of being a heretic for it.** I read about Watts again this week and thought back to my older friend's three little words of advice to those who are aging, "Change is exciting."

But back to Watt's song . . . it begins.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come,

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare Him room,

And heaven and nature sing.

No one can sing this verse sincerely without asking, "Have I bowed my knee to Jesus and now worship Him as my King? Is Jesus ruling over my decisions, my values, my opinions, my relationships, my labors?"

The second verse of this carol moves us to consider our need for this King to personally rescue us from the curse of sin.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, (Not in our own fleshly souls and not in this whole broken world). No more let sins and sorrows grow,

Nor thorns infest the ground;

He comes to make His blessings flow,

Far as the curse is found.

The carol at last moves from the personal to the universal. From the me to the all.

He rules the world *with truth and grace,*

*And **makes the nations prove,***

*The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love.*

This song prompts us to ask some important questions.

How far in this old world is the curse of God against sin found?

How might this King cause God's eternal blessings to flow all through this cursed world?"

Perhaps most mysterious of all, *"How can this King be glorious in righteousness and yet love sinners who deserve eternal condemnation?"*

This morning we turn to Isaiah 53 to find answers to these questions.

Throughout human history kings have demanded that the people of their country suffer for the sake of the king's comfort and power.

Kings have imposed taxes to pay for castles and crowns.

Kings have demanded men to serve in armies where many would lose their lives to keep him on the throne.

Kings have taken lands and houses from families to provide wealth for his children and friends.

Rare is the king in human history who did not demand the people of his nation to sacrifice and suffer for his sake. **Some kings have been more evil and more cruel than others, but almost all have demanded the subjects of the realm to serve them.**

Yet as we open our Bibles to Isaiah we discover a KING who would be different from any other king that the world has ever known. **This King does not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for His people. This King would love His people with a love that transcends description . . . a love that surpasses our ability to understand it.**

Friends, do you know how much your King loves you? It is a kind of love that surpasses all knowledge. I pray that this morning, we will know by experience more of His love's height, depth, width and length. **Personal knowledge of our King's covenantal love for us is the foundation of all spiritual growth.**

Isaiah 53 teaches us that our King's love for us compels Him to endure agonies in our place. No king in all human history suffered for His people like our King suffered for us. **More importantly, our King's suffering was not only a demonstration of His love for us, but it is an effectual suffering.** In other words, His suffering was not simply a sentimental love letter to us, but it was an accomplishment for us . . . His suffering provided the ultimate benefit to us.

Main Idea: The King voluntarily suffers on behalf of His people! This king does not suffer because some other more powerful king attacks Him. This king suffers because apart from His suffering, the people whom He loves will suffer forever without hope and without God. In love, He willingly lays down His life for us.

The Cause of His Suffering

If Jesus is such an Almighty and powerful King, what causes His suffering? Usually kings do not suffer unless some other more powerful king successfully attacks and overcomes them. **So who caused our King to suffer so?**

The answer is not straightforward. On the one hand we could correctly answer, *“Wicked people caused His suffering.”* And on the other hand, we could correctly answer, *“The perfectly righteous and good God of heaven caused His suffering.”* Which is it? YES!!

Our King suffered at the hands of sinful people.

Our King suffered at the hands of His own perfect Father.

Let us first consider that our King suffered at the hands of sinful people.

700 years before Jesus is born in Bethlehem, God announces the coming of His King/Messiah. Here is how the LORD describes this One who is to come:

“Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.”
(Isaiah 52:13 [ESV](#))

Everyone desires the leader of their country to act in wisdom . . . to make decisions that are good and right and true and fruitful for the people. In joy, God announces that His Servant will be that kind of wise leader. **Yet God prophesies that when He comes, the foolish world will refuse to receive Him.**

“Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1)

This is a question that the small remnant who receive God’s promised Messiah ask about the whole world. This is a plaintive groan from God’s people to the peoples of the earth. This King is so beautiful . . . so good . . . so wise . . . so loving . . . so true . . . so righteous! Those who know this good, wise King ask, *“Why does*

not the whole world receive Him? Oh, if they only would! How much pain and conflict and crime and misery flows from this world rejecting Jesus as King!

Isaiah answers his own question:

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” (Isaiah 53:2 [ESV](#))

The peoples do not receive this King because they are blind to His majestic glory. They do not see Him as someone special. God tells us that this uncreated, eternal King will be born of a woman just like every created human being. He will be born of a virgin with blood and fluids covering his newborn body. He will be born in a stable with smelly animals and their warm dung surrounding his cradle. **His glory is hidden from natural eyes that have no faith in God.**

But it is not only that the people do not see Him as beautiful, but they despise Him.

*“He was despised and rejected **by men**, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; **and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**” (Isaiah 53:3 [ESV](#))*

This king is despised because He calls people to turn from their sin and to bow down to Him. **God presses the suffering at the hands of sinful people so that we would all own our part in the King’s suffering. We are not innocent bystanders, we are co-conspirators.**

How bad will the suffering be? Isaiah prophesies . . .

“As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—” (Isaiah 52:14 [ESV](#))

The physical beatings will be so bad that people will look upon this wise servant and ask, **“Is this a human being?”** “This looks like a bloody mass of flesh so badly marred that we can hardly discern whether this is man or beast.”

Friends, we miss the Gospel if we point our fingers of condemnation at the Jewish leaders or the Roman soldiers or Herod or Pilate.

Our proud accusations against others' misses the whole point of the inclusion of these details. **God provides these details so that we will see the self-righteousness of our own hearts . . . the desire within us to resist the LORD as sovereign King over our souls . . . the assertion of our own will and our resistance to bend our will to the true King!**

Isaiah prophesied the coming of the King of all Kings AND he prophesied the rejection of this King by the people.

Question: Who am I in this story? We assert, *"I am not of those who reject the King!"* OK. Why are you not one of those?

Not because your heart is naturally better than those who did.

Truth: If we are among those who embrace Jesus by faith, it is because of one cause . . . in mercy this King has made us see what we otherwise would have not seen. The only people who receive the King are those who have been granted faith and repentance by the KING.

Left to ourselves we are among those who despise Jesus. When we consider those who did not or who do not esteem this King, we fall on our knees in gratitude for the mercy of God that rescues us from such blindness.

Look at the text carefully. Isaiah includes himself when he says, **"WE** esteemed Him not." Isaiah knows that he too is a sinful man who is no different from other sinners.

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; . . . And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"'" (Isaiah 6:1-5 [ESV](#))

We cannot escape the LORD's indictment upon us for the suffering of His Son and King.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;" (Isaiah 53:6 [ESV](#))

Our King suffered at the hands of sinful people.

Our King suffered at the hands of His own perfect Father.

“smitten by God, and afflicted.” (Isaiah 53:4 [ESV](#))

“and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6 [ESV](#))

“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief;” (Isaiah 53:10 [ESV](#))

Why did the Father bring suffering on the Son in whom He delights . . . on the Son whom He loves?

When we look upon the cross of Jesus, we are undone . . . our pride is ground into the dust as we realize what God says about this King’s suffering . . .

*“But he was pierced for **our transgressions**; he was crushed for **our iniquities**; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. **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.**” (Isaiah 53:5–6 [ESV](#))*

If we did not have a severe problem that needed an answer, God’s Son would have remained in heaven . . . Jesus would not have been born in Bethlehem nor have died in Jerusalem.

Truth: The cross is necessary because our sin requires it. The King must suffer if His people are to be free.

God gives such descriptive language to help us see our problem: *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;”*

The root of sin’s wickedness is described right here . . . sin says, *“Lord, I want to make my own decisions. I have a right to make my own mistakes. I will take your advice under consideration, but I get to choose the path I want to take in life.”*

How bad is it for us to go our own way in life? Most people in our world tell us that going our own way in life is actually the best path to happiness and fulfillment.

They speak to us of following our own heart. But our heart is deceitful above all else and desperately wicked.

They urge us to be the **best version of ourselves possible.** But the **best version of ourselves** is not acceptable to God.

They counsel that **happiness is found in being true to yourself and in being confident in yourself.** Yet these are empty promises.

They tell us that the greatest love of all is to love yourself. Not knowing that God is the source, center and end of all true love.

God clearly tells us that simply going our own way in life is our biggest problem. The LORD says that when we go our own way, we separate ourselves from Him.

And **God will not follow us!!** Our natural mind thinks so low of God that we reason that God will follow our lead and bless us as we go our own way. We say, **“God, here is what I am going to do. Now bless me!”** God says, **“No. Here is my path. Follow Me!!”**

Illustration: CC in high school. I went astray and turned to my own way. It did not matter how fast I ran from that point. I was disqualified from the race because I did not stay on the path that was pre-determined for me. Mistake for me, but our problem is willful. We deliberately decide to walk our path.

This may seem like a minor infraction to us, but **to God, our going our own way is the most offensive act of rebellion possible.** When we go our own way, we are saying, “God, thank you, but no thanks. I do not need you as my Shepherd. I know better how to find joy and green pastures than you do. I do not need to you make the most of my life.” This sin separates us completely from God:

“but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” (Isaiah 59:2 ESV)

Why would God act so harshly against something as small as our going our own way in life? Answer: Because God is righteous and He will not let sin persist forever. He will put an end to sin by destroying it. Is it not right and good for God to destroy all sin? **Is that not what sin deserves? YET. If our sins remain attached to our person, we will suffer under with our sin under His righteous destruction.**

Truth: God designs the birth of His King to confront the problem of sin within us.

The Accomplishment of His Suffering

What did the cross of Jesus accomplish?

“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5 ESV)

Three accomplishments of the King’s suffering

- 1. The completion of the punishment that our sin deserves. “upon Him was the punishment/chastisement for sin”.**
- 2. The establishment of peace between us and God. “that brought us peace”**
- 3. The hope of deliverance from death in all its forms. “with His wounds we are healed”.**

Isaiah announces that the suffering of the Messiah accomplishes freedom from the judgment of sin, freedom in a reconciled relationship with God and freedom from the sickness of soul and the fear of death. Only this King could have accomplished such a great salvation.

Truth: God’s King demonstrated His love most powerfully in taking all the sins of the world upon His shoulders and bearing them away from all who believe in Him.

Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. We dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

The ground of our salvation is the accomplishment of Jesus on our behalf. We are not saved by our own accomplishments related to our obedience of God’s law. We stand secure before God as Judge only when we stand clinging to the merit of Jesus.

Truth: Through the accomplishment of the King’s suffering, God opens us door for guilty sinners to be justified. This is a miracle!

The word “justified” is a legal term meaning, “To be declared righteous.” In a court of law, when a guilty person is declared to be not guilty by a jury, we think, “This has been a travesty of justice.” We do not rejoice when murderers or rapists or child traffickers are declared innocent of the crimes that they have committed. Yet the Gospel does just that!! In Romans 4:5, God describes Himself as a God who “justifies the ungodly”.

Our first question in hearing the message of the Gospel is, *“How can God be a righteous Judge and declare the guilty as righteous?”*

The answer to that question is the cross of Christ. At the cross the justice of God and the mercy of God kiss. These two conflicting qualities are reconciled. God in justice punishes our sin at the cross with full payment. AND God in mercy relieves sinners from bearing the guilt and penalty that sin placed upon our lives.

When our sin was laid upon Jesus, the Father treated His Son as though Jesus had committed our sins. God's wrath against our sin was satisfied completely in the suffering of Christ Jesus. Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken Me?" Why? **Because He was being punished by His Father for our sin.**

One day we will give an account of our life as we stand before the Righteous Judge who knows all and sees all. If we do not have a Substitute on that day who has born our sins for us, then we must carry our sins to the bar of justice to be condemned. **How awful to think of the prospect of standing before the Holy One bearing our own sins in our hands!** But we are not left without a Substitute! God has given us Jesus Christ to suffer for us and bear our sins in His body on the tree!

Question: Is Jesus your Substitute? Do you know Him as such? If not, call out to Him today! Jesus! Save me! If yes, learn to rejoice in Him and His atoning work! Chew on this meat each day! **Let us learn to glory in Christ and Him crucified in our place. Let us say to Him who died as our Substitute,** *"Lord Jesus, I am your sin, You are my Righteousness. You have born upon yourself what is rightfully mine, and have freely given me what is rightfully yours. You became what you were not so that I might become what I was not!"* (Luther loosely paraphrased.)

Two applications:

1. The cross of Jesus frees us to enjoy God without fear of condemnation.

God has no more wrath to pour out on us for our sin because it was completely exhausted in the cross of Jesus. Our guilt is taken from us as it was carried by Christ. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **God's righteous wrath against our sin is satisfied fully with the punishment for our sin in the death of Jesus on the cross.**

Story: Story of hunters out on the dry prairie. Far away on the horizon one noticed a cloud of smoke. Soon, he could hear the sound of crackling. A wind came up and he realized the terrible truth: a brush-fire was advancing his way. It was moving so fast that he and his friend could not outrun it. One of them began to rifle through his pockets to find some matches. To his friend's amazement, he pulled out a match and struck it. He lit a small fire around the two of them. Soon they were standing in a circle of blackened earth, waiting for the brush fire to come. They did not have to wait long. They covered their mouths with their handkerchiefs and braced themselves. The fire came near-and swept over them. But they were completely unhurt. They weren't even touched. Fire would not burn the place where fire had already burned.

The punishment of God's law is like the brush-fire. We cannot escape it. But if we stand in the burned-over place, where law has already burned its way through, then we will not get hurt. Not a hair of our head will be singed. **The death of Christ is the burned-over place.** There I huddle, hardly believing yet relieved. Christ's death has disarmed the law. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

When we stand before God on the day of judgment, we stand united with Christ Jesus our Savior who made sacrifice for us. God looks upon Him and pardons me.

2. **The cross of Jesus frees us to love our brothers and sisters even though we sin against each other.** We are united by our mutual experience of being washed by the blood of Jesus. We know that we do not deserve God's forgiveness, yet in Christ Jesus we have obtained it. Having been forgiven so much, we are made willing to forgive one another. Having been given favor in spirit of our sins, we are made willing to grant favor to one another in Christ.

The Invitation of His Suffering

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Isaiah 55:1 [ESV](#))

Truth: Jesus suffering gives Him freedom to invite sinners to His feast. No king ever suffered for his people like our king suffered for us.

“Come” what a word of invitation! This word demands a response. Either we come or we do not come. To ignore the invitation is to reject it.

KNOWING of the King's suffering is not enough.

APPRECIATING the King's suffering is not enough.

The King invites us to ENJOY the accomplishments of His suffering . . . to drink of the water of life that He purchased with His blood.

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” (Isaiah 55:2 [ESV](#))

What does your sin bring you that keeps you at its table? What does the world offer you that entices you to reject the King’s invitation to His banquet?

“Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” (Isaiah 55:3 [ESV](#))

Do you know what you are rejecting when you refuse to receive the invitation the King makes for you to come to His table? You are rejecting life in your soul. You are turning away from a covenant that binds you to Me and to my love forever and ever.

Friend, what will you do with this King’s invitation?

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:6-7 [ESV](#))

To “seek” the LORD is to pursue Him with interest. To wake up from spiritual slumber and chase after Him. To turn away from the garbage dump of sin and to be washed by His blood and to be clothed in His righteousness.

Will you seek Him today? He is a King who keeps every promise that He makes!!

Eternal joy awaits every person who receives this King. Joy to the world! The LORD has come. Let earth receive her King!

Conclusion:

John Flavel, the Puritan pastor, with his antiquated English, helps us imagine the conversation between the Father and the Son in eternity past:

Father: My Son, here is a company of poor miserable souls, that have utterly undone themselves, and now lie open to my justice. Justice demands satisfaction for them or will satisfy itself in the eternal ruin of them. What shall be done for these souls?

Son: O my Father, such is my love and pity for them that, rather than they shall perish eternally, I will be responsible for them as their Surety. [Prov, p. 370] Bring in all thy bills, that I may see what they owe thee. Lord, bring them all in, that there may be no after-reckonings with them. At my hand shalt thou require it. I will rather choose to suffer thy wrath than they should suffer it. Upon me, my Father, upon me be all their debt.

Father: But my Son, if thou undertake for them, thou must reckon to pay the last cent. Expect no discounts. If I spare them, I will not spare thee.

Son: Content, Father. Let it be so. Charge it all to me. I am able to pay it. And though it prove a kind of undoing to me, though it impoverish all my riches, empty all my treasures, yet I am content to undertake it.⁹