Sunday, April 4, 2021

Lesson: Isaiah 53:4-11; Time of Action: 700-695 B.C.; Place of Action: Jerusalem

Golden Text: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

I. INTRODUCTION. We are seldom, if ever called upon to experience vicarious suffering, that is, suffering done on behalf of someone else. This was the nature of Jesus’ suffering. It was suffering done for others. Isaiah’s prophecy in this week’s lesson was delivered around seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, yet the accuracy of the prophecy concerning the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus is striking. As the Prophet Isaiah looked ahead to the Messiah, he saw Him as the suffering Servant.

II. THE BACKGROUND FOR THE LESSON. The book of Isaiah is the first of the writings of the Prophets in the Bible, and Isaiah, the author, is generally considered to be the greatest prophet. The events given in chapters 1-39 occurred during Isaiah’s ministry around 700 B.C. and chapters 40-66 may have been written near the end of his life.
about 681 B.C. Isaiah was God’s special messenger to Judah, the southern kingdom. But the first 39 chapters of the book, generally carry the message of judgment to Judah, Israel (the northern kingdom), and the surrounding pagan nations to repent of their sins. Judah had a form of godliness, but in their hearts they were corrupt. Isaiah’s warnings were intended to purify the people by helping them understand God’s true nature and message. However, they ignored Isaiah’s repeated warnings. The last 27 chapters, 40-66 generally bring a message of forgiveness, comfort, and hope for the nation. The message of hope looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. In chapter 52, Isaiah has a vision of Jerusalem during the millennium and the comfort and restoration God will provide to Israel with the backdrop of the Babylonian Captivity (see Isaiah 52:1-12). Then in verses 13-15, Isaiah begins his prophesy concerning the Messiah’s suffering and exaltation. In chapter 53:1-3, Isaiah continued to describe the Messiah’s coming, and how he was negatively received by the Jews. Our lesson this week begins with verse 4 and vividly depicts God’s anointed Suffering Servant whom we know today to be our LORD Jesus Christ.

III. THE SUFFERING SERVANT STRICKEN (Isaiah 53:4-6)

A. The Sin Bearer (Isaiah 53:4-5).

1. (vs. 4). This verse says “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem
him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” The word “Surely” reveals a change in Israel’s understanding. It introduces a discussion of what really took place and that the Servant’s suffering and death were purposeful and not happenstance. By using the word “hath” or had, the prophet was speaking in the past tense as if what he’s about to say had already happened. In the mind of God, it had. Part of Jesus’ purpose in coming was that “he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” Both “griefs” and “sorrows” are the consequences of sin, and convey the idea of Jesus taking them upon Himself and carrying them away. Peter wrote that Jesus in “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (see I Peter 2:24). This is the concept of substitution that the Jews failed to understand about Jesus. Especially since the law stated, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (see Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). The failure of the Jews to understand the concept of substitution, and the true nature of Jesus’ suffering caused them to “esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” In other words, those who rejected Jesus wrongly assumed that He suffered because of His own sin as punishment from “God.”

2. (vs. 5). This verse says “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Here we have further examples of the concept of the substitutionary work of Jesus. He died for our sins; that is He took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved because of our sin. Four statements here describe the Servant’s suffering on our
behalf. First, *he was wounded for our transgressions.* The term “wounded” in Hebrew means “pierced” which speaks of Jesus’ wounds on the cross caused by nails and a spear (see Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34; 20:25, 27). His suffering would be for our *transgressions,* that is, for our acts of rebellion against God and His Word. Second, *he was bruised for our iniquities.* The word “bruised” means “crushed” and implies physical death. The Hebrew word translated “iniquities” comes from a verb root that means “to bend,” “to make crooked,” or “to distort.” From this came the meaning of acting perversely or sinning. So, He was crushed for our sins. The third statement that describes the Servant’s suffering is, *the chastisement of our peace was upon him.* The word “chastisement” comes from a verb meaning “to discipline.” The Servant took upon Himself the corrective steps (suffering and death) taken by God to restore *peace* between Himself and sinful humanity (see Ephesians 2:14-17; II Corinthians 5:21). Finally, the fourth description of the Servant’s suffering is *with his stripes we are healed.* The term “stripes” refers to contusions and other marks caused by scourging (see Matthew 27:26) and beating (see Matthew 27:30).

**Note:** Scourging refers to an investigation of a prisoner that began with his beating (see Acts 22:24). The scourging was done using a whip with a handle and with one or more leather cords or thongs attached to it. Sometimes these cords were knotted or weighted with pieces of metal or bone to make the whip more effective as a flesh-cutting instrument. The Hebrew word translated “healed” comes from a verb that literally means “to sew together,” “to mend,” or “to repair.”
“Healed” here refers to spiritual healing and therefore to the gift of spiritual life that the Servant provided for sinners by dying on the cross (see Romans 6:23; II Corinthians 5:21). Two benefits come to those who believe Isaiah’s report concerning the suffering Servant—“peace” with God, and spiritual healing or eternal life. Each of us carries a load of “iniquities” or sins that make it impossible to have “peace” with God aside from faith in Jesus Christ. Punishment had to be meted out if we are to have that “peace.”

B. Straying Sheep (Isaiah 53:6). This verse says “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The focus of this passage briefly changes from the Servant’s death to the behavior of mankind that caused it. Speaking on behalf of the Israelites the prophet said “All we like sheep have gone astray.” The word “All” indicates that the indictment includes everyone both Jews and Gentiles (see Romans 3:10-12). The idea of straying “sheep” pictures sinners as helpless and unaware of how vulnerable they are. Imitating the first parents, the fallen or estranged human race does not naturally seek fellowship with the true God. But instead “we have turned every one to his own way” which means that mankind has chosen to follow their own paths (see Romans 5:12). Sinners disobey God of their own free will, not because someone or something forces them to. They willfully choose not to enjoy the blessings of God’s green pastures. God’s holiness demands that sin be punished; but in His love for mankind, God provided a means for people to escape His justifiable wrath upon sin. Since punishment must be meted
out for our sin, if we are to have peace with God, “the Lord hath laid on him (the Suffering Servant) the iniquity of us all.” In other words, “the iniquity” or sins of Adam’s descendants, which includes all of mankind, fell harshly on the divine Servant who is our Substitute. Jesus’ suffering was vicarious or substitutionary—He took our place. As our Substitute, He paid a price we could never pay (see I Peter 1:18-19). He suffered the just penalty for sin which is death (see Ezekiel 18:4; 18:20; Romans 6:21, 23). The Hebrew verb translated “hath laid” means “to hit” or “to strike” violently. The idea here is that the blows of death fell not only on the Servant’s soul, but also on His body. The terminology used here sees “iniquity” as being capable of causing serious injury.

IV. THE SUFFERING SERVANT’S PASSION (Isaiah 53:7-9)

A. The Servant’s silence (Isaiah 53:7). This verse says, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” One of the things that we notice about Jesus’ suffering is that it was voluntary. He patiently endured being “oppressed, and...afflicted” by His tormentors. The Servant also suffered in silence, for when “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.” The gospels recount Jesus’ refusal to defend Himself before Pilate (see Matthew 27:11-14; Mark
15:1-5), and Peter wrote that Jesus “when he was reviled, reviled not again…” (see I Peter 2:23). In the manner of a “dumb” animal, “a lamb,” Jesus neither verbally objected nor offered any other resistance, yet “he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb.” “Sheep” don’t resist the butcher, but go meekly to the slaughterhouse because they don’t recognize the deadly danger ahead. Likewise, the Servant was submissive to the suffering and death for which He had come into the world (see Mark 10:45). The Servant was treated like an animal, but He had full knowledge of His coming ordeal. Amazingly, He acted like “a lamb” as He faced His executioners, for He said nothing (see Mark 14:61; 15:5). To add more emphasis, the prophet said once again “yet he opened not his mouth.” Regardless of what it looked like, the Servant was not the victim of His circumstances; He was the victor over His circumstances (see John 10:17-18).

B. The Servant’s sentence (Isaiah 53:8-9).

1. (vs. 8). This verse says “He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” The Servant’s failure to speak hurried the end sought by His enemies for “He was taken from prison and from judgment.” After His unjust oppression and mock trial, Jesus was “taken” away and “cut off out of the land of the living” by His death. The question “and who shall declare his generation?” has elicited different
interpretations. It might simply mean that Jesus didn’t leave any descendants. However, this phrase can be translated, “and who among His generation considered?” indicating that those who were present considered Jesus’ death to be unimportant. The people of that day didn’t realize that it was their sins that He was dying for, and that He was suffering their punishment. Jesus’ generation didn’t consider what was happening to Him to be important, because it was “for the transgression of my (God’s) people was he stricken” or experienced such suffering.

2. (vs. 9). This verse says “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” The fact that “he made his grave with the wicked” means that those who crucified Jesus intended by crucifying Him with two thieves (see Matthew 27:38) to bury Him “with the wicked” or with convicted criminals. This would have happened if Joseph of Arimathaea, a friend had not intervened. Because of his kindness, Jesus was placed “with the rich in his death.” This means that Joseph of Arimathaea was “the rich” man who provided his tomb for Jesus’ burial (see Matthew 27:57-60). Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled to the letter! Jesus was buried in a “rich” man’s tomb instead of with two thieves “because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” In other words, God the Father was the force behind this strange series of events, honoring His Son because no fault of any kind could be found in Him (see Luke 23:4, 14; John 18:38; 19:4, 6; 1 Peter 2:21-23).
V. THE SUFFERING SERVANT SATISFIED (Isaiah 53:10-11)

A. The Servant brought low to be lifted high (Isaiah 53:10). This verse says “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt 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.” Although the Father glorified His Son in death, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.” This does not mean the Father took pleasure in the Son’s suffering, but recognizes that the suffering was part of God’s larger plan and His will was being done (see John 8:29; Hebrews 10:7). God did not rejoice sadistically in watching His Son suffer terrible pain; instead, in these events God saw the accomplishing of His saving plan which was made in eternity past (see Ephesians 1:4), a plan that would be to “the praise of his glory” (see Ephesians 1:9-14). Note: What took place magnified God’s attributes—His grace, love, justice, righteousness, and sovereignty. Jesus’ substitutionary death enabled a holy God outraged by man’s sins to extend forgiveness to sinners and be just in the process. Isaiah also prophesied that “when thou (God) shalt make his (Jesus) soul an offering for sin, he (Jesus) shall see his seed.” The term “soul” can refer to the immaterial part of a person or to the whole person. Since Jesus’ physical sufferings are vividly described, “soul” here most likely refers to the whole person. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for
“offering for sin” was used for the trespass offering (see Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-6). This ritual involved the offering of a slain animal by persons who had trespassed against God or their neighbors, as well as restitution. Jesus didn’t die only to bear all our punishments, but also at the same time to pay to God every debt we owed Him. But Jesus becoming “an offering for sin” or an “offering” for sinners’ trespasses was not the end, for the prophet went on to say “he shall see his seed.” The Servant would die, but be victorious over death. He would be resurrected and “see” His spiritual “seed” or spiritual offspring; all those who are saved and have accepted His death on their behalf (see Hebrews 2:10-13). The prophet then says “he (the Father) shall prolong his (the Servant’s) days.” This statement looks beyond the Messiah’s death to His resurrection and unending life. Jesus will live eternally. In the last part of this verse, Isaiah said “and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his (the Servant’s) hand.” This refers to the successful completion of God’s plan through the Servant. The Servant’s saving work will “prosper,” for it is in accordance with the “pleasure of the LORD,” that is, the will of God. The phrase “in his hand” means by the Servant’s “hand” (see Numbers 36:13 where God is said to have worked by Moses’ hand). This remarkable part of the prophecy could be believed only by those to whom the arm or power of the LORD was revealed (see Isaiah 53:1). This is true today too, for many people still deny the truth of Jesus’ empty tomb. It’s one of history’s best-attested facts, but still the Holy Spirit has to convince each sinner that Jesus was resurrected and lives today.
B. The successful Servant (Isaiah 53:11). Our final verse says “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.” Many people don’t live to see the fulfillment of their life’s work. But this was not the case with the suffering Servant. Isaiah declared that “He shall see of the travail of his soul” which means that the Servant will see all that has been accomplished by the “travail” or anguish of “His soul.” Even though the Father’s plan included the Son’s suffering (see Hebrews 10:5-14), the Son “shall be satisfied” with what His substitutionary death will accomplish (see Hebrews 12:2). In other words, the Servant will “be satisfied” as He looks back on His suffering and sees the outcome—the salvation of sinners. At this point, the Father takes the role of speaker as the subject turns to justification. The LORD said “by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” The Hebrew for “by his knowledge” can also be translated “by the knowledge of Him” which seems to be what is meant here. This would mean that the sinner’s salvation comes through personal knowledge, (which includes faith) of Jesus who God calls “my righteous servant.” One of the most encouraging statements in this passage is that Jesus, God’s “righteous Servant” will “justify many.” A person who knows Jesus Christ by faith is “justified” or declared righteous (right with God) on the basis of Jesus’ death. The Apostle John witnessed a fulfillment of this when he saw in heaven “a great multitude, which no man could number” (see Revelation 7:9). In the last part of this verse, the LORD said that His “righteous Servant” will “justify many” because “he shall bear their
iniquities” meaning that He would take responsibility for our sins. **Note:** The great privilege that comes to us from the death of Jesus Christ is justification from sin, our being declared not guilty of the sin which alone can ruin us, and accepted into God’s favour, which alone can give us joy. Jesus Christ, who purchased our justification for us, applies it to us by His intercession that He made for us, His gospel preached to us, and His Spirit witnessing in us.

VI. **Conclusion.** The vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ is the crux of God’s saving plan. Jesus’ death satisfied God’s justice and opened up the only possible way of salvation. The death of Jesus is the only true basis for a relationship with God. We are in error when we allow this truth to become secondary or forgotten. We are not called upon to suffer for our own sins, nor are we called upon to suffer for the sins of others. We are called upon to simply believe that Jesus suffered for us. Indeed, salvation cost us nothing; but it was tremendously costly for the LORD. Let us never belittle the saving work of Christ. We who are saved may be called upon to suffer for the sake of Christ (see I Peter 4:12-19), but we will never suffer eternal punishment for our sins. Jesus took care of that. Hallelujah!
Sunday, April 4, 2021: “The Suffering Servant” Commentary (The ISSL Curriculum)

***The International Sunday School Lesson Curriculum***