

Title: Called to Suffer
Text: Isaiah 53.7-9
Theme: The unjust suffering of the Servant
Series: Isaiah #46
Prop Stmt: God uses the ultimate inequity to accomplish the greatest redemption
Aim: I aim to call people to trust in God's providences as they are working out a magnificent plan.

Read Text:

I was recently married, serving as a youth pastor on a small salary, driving an older model car, when a guy ran a red light and t-boned me. He was in a company car. A fellow salesman was behind him in another company car, and when the police came to the scene, his co-worker said that I had run the light. I was stunned. I was also naïve. How could someone lie so boldly? Years later someone ran into one of our vehicles at a farm market and simply drove away. A couple of years ago, a distracted driver hit my wife's car in the side in a school parking lot. I got that fixed about the time another driver backed into her at Kroger's, promised to fix it and refused to return phone calls. I haven't got that one fixed. I've just about given up. I expect accidents to happen. It is just frustrating when I have to pay for the repeated failures of others. You just want to scream. Media attention recently came upon a young lady who after winning a million dollars in the lottery continued to receive food stamps.

There are not too many things that grip our gut tighter, than being falsely accused or having to pay for the failures of others who refuse to take responsibility. But, this issue of injustice goes deeper than taxes and banged up cars. A young husband and father, serving in a leadership position in a wonderful church recently discovered that the baby girl that he and his wife just had has a serious genetic disorder and is going to be severely affected for the rest of her life. As the weight of this new reality began to set upon him, he surmised that there were two options: a) God allowed, permitted, or ordained for this to happen or b) there is no God. "a" was too painful, he chose "b".

The issue of injustice is personal. I would argue that the very reason it bothers us so much is because there is a God. If there was no God, there would be grounding for ethics in thought and no internal compass or personal sense of justice to be violated. The very fact that injustice hurts is simply evidence that we are made in the image of a just and righteous God. We are not perfectly just and righteous, but we at least have a sense of justice, even if we are inconsistent with it. The three verses that we are going to study this morning speak of injustice. These words capture us because they speak to our hearts. These were the words that the official from the Ethiopian empire was reading one day when Philip caught up to him and asked him if he understood what he was reading. The story is told in Acts 8. The injustice of these verses and the fact that the problem was left unresolved caused him to say, "Who is this?" It doesn't make sense. I don't get it. What is it about this text that makes it so difficult to understand who it is talking about? The biggest tension comes from all of the misunderstanding that is associated with this person. He shall be exalted (52.13), but his appearance is so disfigured that he does not

even look human (52.14). People will not believe that he is the Messiah, even if they are told (53.1). He doesn't look the part. In fact, he is despised, rejected and seems to be cursed by God. And yet, all of these curses and afflictions that he suffered were due to others. "I don't get it." It doesn't seem fair. It isn't. He bears our griefs and our sorrows. He is wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. He gets punishment and we get peace. He gets stripes and we get healing. We go our own way, live our own lives, do it our way, march by our own beat, play by our own rules, because we will not have this man rule over us and all the while this continual rebellion only adds to the heap of sin that is laid upon Christ (6). But, while all of our garbage is dumped on him, nothing is explicitly stated about his guilt until now. Not only does he bear our weight but these verses make it so clear that he did absolutely nothing to deserve it.

Now as parents, we have learned to be suspicious about our kids' claims of total innocence. We've all heard it. I was just standing here, and he hit me for no reason. Yea? Yea. You weren't doing a thing? Nope. You didn't look at him funny, you didn't say anything to him, you didn't pretend to hit him... - nothing? Well.... It's after the "well" that the rest of the story comes out. If you are waiting for the rest of the story, there is nothing that justifies any of the punishment on Christ. That is why these verses are stunning, intriguing, shocking and deeply perplexing. They speak of things that draw us in and invite investigation. We read these and try to make sense of what they are saying. We are going to look at two main points:

1. **What happened?**

- a. **The Servant silently and willingly accepted oppression. (7)**

When you read verse 7, you see that the phrase, "he opened not his mouth" is repeated. I said earlier that when we are in the midst of injustice, we want to scream. When we read the accounts of the trial of Christ, he does not defend himself. Why not? Why doesn't he say something? Do you remember when they went to arrest him in the garden? Do you remember how they responded when he identified himself by saying "I AM." That claim to deity literally knocked them to the ground. They had no hold on him. They possessed no ultimate nor even practical authority to bring him in. So now, with his trial before Pilate and then Herod and then Pilate again going sideways and with all of these absurd accusations being thrown at him, why doesn't he say something? The answer has to do with his willingness to die. This is self-surrender. He was not caught up in a whirlwind of events that overwhelmed him, and over which he had no control. He was not a naïve lamb being led to the slaughter who did not know what was on the other side of the curtain. He was God, the very God in the form of man, who humbled himself like a lamb. He knew exactly what was going to happen and he subjected himself to be treated as one who could be taken advantage of with no consequence.

We have seen the look of vengeance in the eyes of those who are unjustly punished. The superheroes of our movies give the stare of death and seek to intimidate their captors with resolve of steel. We rehearse their one-liners that drip with determination. That's how we get justice. Christ, like a lamb stands before its shearers and subjects itself to its shearers,

said, “no one takes my life” but then chooses to lay it down.” Who does that? Who is this? Irony is all throughout this. We are the ones who, like sheep go astray. He is the one, who, like a lamb willingly submits himself to the torment of his abusers, all the while, doing this for them.

b. The Servant suffered the height of injustice. (8)

He was “taken away” violently, suddenly, without due process and then cut off, discarded like a piece of worthless trash. He was taken out of the city and treated like refuse because (causal force of the sentence) his contemporaries ignored him. They gave no thought to him. He was of no account to them. As far as they were concerned, he did not matter!

Sex trafficking of children is an enormous business in S.E. Asia. This past week PBS spotlighted the problem in Cambodia. Families regularly sell their 3 and 4 year old daughters to brothels. After years of torture and unspeakable abuse, many of them are killed. The ones who live, are either so diseased, or considered to be so damaged, tarnished and shameful, that they have nowhere to go. Their families who sold them, will not take them back. They are stigmatized. They are considered to be disposable. They do not matter. That is what “his generation” thought of him. “Who considered that he was cut off?” Who cared what happened to him? Who cared if the court was rigged, the jury was stacked, and the judge was bribed? Who cares? This guy does not matter! He is a no-name, a reject, an insignificant loser. Yet, it wasn’t the fact that a corrupt legal proceeding caused his death. He was stricken for the transgression of my people.” It was an injustice. It was the height of injustice. But he was not a victim. He was a willing participant in the injustice that was poured out on him. And they did not see it. They completely failed to realize that this one whom they considered to be so expendable was in reality enduring the their punishment. The blows for rebellion that otherwise would have pummeled them, instead pummeled him.

c. The Servant defies accepted categories of understanding. (9)

He died as the wicked and yet, he was in reality innocent. He died, not only as one who was submissive and willing to suffer, he died as one who was indeed completely innocent. He had not done a thing! At this point, these statements really make no sense. He had not done any violence, and yet he died a violent death. There was no deceit in his mouth, yet he was lied against, and he said nothing in his own defense. He was innocent, and yet he died with the wicked. And then comes this interesting and yet confusing statement; “*And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.*” What do you do with that? How are you supposed to understand this? This statement is not a blow-off statement attributed to poetic license. They made his grave with the wicked (plural) and with a rich man (singular) in his death. This Servant is going to die with the wicked and be buried with the rich. And that is exactly what happened to Christ – isn’t it? He died between two thieves (the wicked) and was buried in a rich man’s tomb. Who, other than God could have predicted that?

Months ago I told you the story of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Amongst those findings were the oldest copies of the Bible known to exist. Part of the Dead Sea Scroll collection is a copy of the entire book of Isaiah. Dated around 300-400 BC, this discovery has blown apart so many liberal assumptions about the Bible. Liberal scholars look at predictions like this in Isaiah and conclude that there is no way that anyone could have predicted with such astonishing accuracy the details of the future, unless it was God. Therefore, this had to have been written ages later and pretended to be part of Isaiah. It's just too accurate!

2. Why did this happen?

d. For our salvation

First and foremost, it happened for our salvation. Why didn't Christ say anything when he was unjustly accused and unfairly punished for our sins? If he defended himself then he would have placed more importance upon his vindication than on his mission to be our Savior. He could have defended himself. He had a solid case. There was no evidence to convict him. There was really nothing that they had to but threats and emotional accusations. If he had demanded justice, then he would have gotten justice, and if he had received justice, we would receive justice. You see, he could tolerate the misunderstanding, the rejection, the false shame, accusations and humiliation. He could tolerate, even accept death that he did not deserve, but he could not tolerate, he could not accept us having no payment for our sin.

The only way that we would be spared judgment was if a perfectly righteous substitute was offered in our place. He died so that you would not have to. He was scorned so that you could be accepted. He was considered guilty so that you could be forgiven. He was rejected so that you would never have to be alone.

One of the girls featured in the Cambodia report was taken at such a young age, that she does not even remember her name. One day, for whatever reason, she decided that she had had enough. The brothel owners gouged out her eye in retaliation. If they could not make money off of her, they would ensure that no one would ever want anything to do with her. Scarred on the inside and disfigured on the outside, this young lady was thrown out into a world where all that she had known was a family that sold her, men who used her, and people who tortured her. What are her chances? That was a little while ago. She was cared for by people who seemed as if they were from a different world. They treated her and told her things that she did not know. She has a name now. It is a name that she chose. In the Cambodian language it means "forgiven." She found out something. She really does matter. She matters to the One who really matters. She matters to the One who took ultimate rejection, for her salvation. But there is more.

e. For our example

i. For Old Testament believers

We read this text, as we should through the lens of the NT. We see Christ, like the gospel writers as the fulfillment of the promise of the Servant. But, at the time of his writing, Isaiah did not know how all of this was going to come together. He wrote and spoke what God told him to. He did it by faith, even in terms that seemed to make no sense at all. For Judah, this Servant was a promise that God was going to bring about deliverance. They were not going to stay in exile in Babylon forever. They were going to go through a time of judgment, but would be saved through that judgment. That is what this Servant is illustrating to them. He, Christ, was saved through judgment. He was vindicated by his resurrection. God had the entire plan figured out. Trust Him. But, this point is necessary for us.

ii. For New Testament believers

This is the point that Peter makes in 1 Peter 2 (read). He quotes this text and tells us how to respond to injustice. You are going to suffer injustice. What do you do when you are accused of something that you did not do? What do you do when something happens unfairly to someone whom you love? If you do not have Christ, then you have some very limited choices: bitterness, vengeance, cynicism, hopelessness, or escape. If you have Christ, you do not have to be buried by, nor defined by injustice. Instead:

1. Recognize that you are called to suffer. (21)
2. Focus on the ultimate injustice that was done to Christ. (21b)
3. Realize that this is a gracious thing. (19, 20)
4. Look forward to the amazing good that God will do. (24-25)

Valery Eroshkin is the pastor of the Transfiguration Church in Oryol, Russia. Like many gospel loving churches in Russia, they minister to the outcasts of Russian society, who are the disabled children. These children are rejected by their families because they do not fit the Russian image of strength and society does not know what to do with them. Most of their time, they are collected into orphanages where they are kept in deplorable conditions, but Christians reach out and care for them. In the city of Oryol, a young boy lived in one such orphanage without the use of his arms or legs. Gradually he came to understand the gospel and one day he trusted in Christ, believing that Jesus had come to the earth in order to bear his sins and die in his place. This angry boy was changed.

Meanwhile, this church had purchased some property on the outskirts of the city and wanted to construct a building. It is both customary, expected and assumed that anyone wanting a building permit would pay off the city official. The church would not do that, but kept entrusting this matter to God. For months, and perhaps even a couple of years, they were turned down.

One day, this young boy decided that the gospel that had saved him, needed to be shared with his family. Although they did not visit him, he decided to go and visit them. He arranged for a ride and one day went back to his home to tell his family about the gospel. His father, was ashamed and angry and did not want to see his son, expect that his son told him that he was not bitter with him. It was like Joseph. What you meant for evil, God

meant for good. I got to hear about Jesus. And he told his dad about the gospel. As you have now guessed, this father was the city official who kept denying this church a building permit. When he saw the evidence of grace in the life of his son, and found out about this church, he contacted Valery and approved the permit. On my first trip to Russia, Kevin Hatfield and I had the chance to visit this church. I taught there for two weeks. But, this is so much more than the story of a building; it is the story of how God uses temporary injustice to show off eternal grace. He will do the same for you.