

He Died so that we might Live

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. How lovely to see you. Let me encourage you to have those verses in Isaiah 52 and 53 open in front of you as we journey on this morning, because these are what we've just read, some of the most wonderful verses in the entire of the Bible.

If you're here today and you're asking yourself, perhaps, who is this God that Christians follow? Who is this God? What is he like? Which are some great questions to be asking ourselves. If those are your questions, let me encourage you to tune in to what this passage is telling us, what God is saying to us in his word, because these verses will get us right to the heart of who God is and what he is like.

Now, to get us into this, let me tell you about a little conversation that happened around the Shanks family dinner table this week. I came home on Monday and Alex had prepared a lovely roast chicken.

complete with the trimmings. It was lovely. We were there, the four of us, our two little girls. We were tucking into this meal and Chloe, our four-year-old, she turns to us out of the blue and she asks us, how did the chicken get on my plate?

[1 : 17] So the two of us slightly panicked. We just say the first thing that comes into our minds. We say, well, we got it from Tesco. Eating a little bit more. She's not quite having it. She asks us again, yeah, but how did the chicken get on my plate?

And so we think, right, we'll need to take the step one further. And we say to her, well, the farmer, he looked after the chicken on the farm with all the other chickens. And then he packaged the chicken and he sent it off to Tesco.

And we bought it from Tesco. Now we're eating it. And it seemed to satisfy her for about 30 seconds. And once again, she asks once again, yeah, but how? How did the chicken get on my plate?

And we realized, the two of us, that we're just going to have to tell her how the chicken got on her plate. Because what was true for the carrot on her plate, and was true for the green bean on her plate, and was true for the potato on her plate, was true for the chicken on her plate, that the chicken had to die.

Because if the chicken didn't die, then we couldn't eat. And if we don't eat, then we don't live. So quite simply, the chicken died so that we can live.

[2 : 35] And Isaiah 52 and 53, friends, if you're looking for a theme, if you're looking for a big idea that will take you through this passage, this glorious truth is that Jesus Christ died so that we can live.

This is the message of these verses. He died so that we can live. Now, if you've got them there, verse 13, God thunders in here. The last of these servant songs, we've been looking at them over the past few weeks, we've reached the last one, probably the thickest one, the most theological rich, the one that gets us right to the heart of this servant, who he is and what he will do.

And God says, you see him thunder in verse 13, he says, Behold my servant. Look at him. In other words, have a look at him. See who he is. Let me tell you about him.

Let me tell you what he will do. Let me tell you what his life will be like. And most importantly, let me tell you what it will mean for you. Because when you get that, when you understand who this Savior is, Jesus Christ, my servant, the one that I will send, it will quite simply send you to your knees and it will blow your mind.

But let me just get us into Isaiah. Remember, these are not just isolated words. These are words that are written in a specific time, written to a specific people, written for all people, but written in a specific time.

[4 : 00] They're written in the book of Isaiah. And we've been journeying through this little section that started at chapter 40 and kind of runs through right to the end of chapter 55 as God speaks to a generation who will find themselves in exile.

And the thing about these chapters is that there is a massive tension in the text. Go home and check it out for yourselves.

You may notice it as we've walked through it over the past few weeks. There's a tension in the text because God has been making some really, really big promises, massive promises.

Promises about what he will do for his people who will soon find themselves in exile and we'll be sitting there thinking the game's up, it's over for us. Not going to hope. We're finished.

God's making some big promises. Let's just pick out a few of these. Big promises that he will pardon their iniquity. That he will rescue them. That he will forgive them.

[5 : 01] And he will somehow make a way that their sins will be remembered no more in his sight. He will deal with the sin of his people. He will make them guiltless before any accuser.

That he will glorify them in that he will so radically change them. That somehow they will now turn, that their lives will now reflect something of his greatness to the watching world.

And promises that God is so lovingly committed to that he would describe himself as having the names of his people inscribed in the palms of his hands.

Now think about that imagery for a second. The names of his people inscribed on the palms of his hands. Of course words that won't just be metaphorical words that will be real with the coming of Jesus Christ.

You know when you go to Starbucks, what do they do? What's your name? I've had some tremendous spellings of Graham over the years, let me tell you. What do they do? They write your name on the side of a cup. It's meant to make you feel special, isn't it? God is saying to his people, I have got your names on the palms of my hand.

[6 : 06] That is how committed I am to showing you how much I love you, my faithfulness. Get that. And all these promises, the thing to see is that the people will not bring them about by themselves.

There's zero chance of that happening. God says, I will make salvation spring up from the ground. In other words, this is going to be all of grace. Grace, just getting something that you don't deserve. And God is going to do this for his people. Marvelous words, marvelous promises. But as well as big promises, God's put his finger on some big, big problems. Problems that are true with his people.

Problems that are true with the people of the world. Problems that we know are true in our own lives. Our blatant sin. The people's blatant sin against a holy God. Their refusal to acknowledge him and his ways.

Their rebellion. The fact that they don't want to go God's way. They want to go their way. And their hypocrisy. And the injustice that is rife amongst them as a people.

[7 : 09] They're just disregarding how God has told them to live. And that stuff, that sin has provoked God's righteous anger. And that needs to be dealt with.

So think about the tension. Both of these things are true. You've got promises. And you've got problems. And God says he will be faithful to both. But how can that be? You ever thought about that?

That's the tension in the text. How can God be true to his promises and yet deal with the problems? Let me put it another way. This is a question I remember.

I asked it myself. When I was thinking about the things of Christianity. Here it is. How can God be perfectly loving? And how can he be at the same time perfectly just?

How can he be both fully without compromising on either? How will he do that? If you're into your TV dramas, you'll know that the best in the business have got a wonderful way of building the tension in a plot to the point that the viewer is left thinking, how on earth is this one going to resolve itself?

[8 : 21] Have you ever thought that as you've watched the TV drama? How is this going to resolve itself? What's going to happen? And then all of a sudden that moment comes, doesn't it? When you see it, you get it.

Oh, that's how it's happened. That's how this tension resolves itself. And you're left thinking to yourself, wow, because I would never have saw that coming. Well, in these verses, God is saying, here is how I'm going to do it.

And it centers on his servant who will die so that we can live. And this passage takes us straight to the cross of Jesus Christ.

You might have picked that up from the songs we've been singing earlier. This is where this passage takes us, to the cross of Jesus Christ, the symbol of Christianity. People sing about the cross, don't they?

People write about the cross. People wear a cross. People get tattoos of the cross. I wonder if you've ever asked yourself, what is the big deal about the cross? It's the centerpiece of our church logo. I wonder if you've ever asked yourself, why?

[9 : 25] Why do people get so hung up about remembering somebody's death that happened 2,000 odd years ago? Well, the thing about the why is that these verses answer the why.

This is why. This is not just news. If you look back just to chapter 52, verse 7. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

In other words, God is saying, what I'm about to tell you in chapter 53 is good news. This is good news. Now, there's so much we could say about these verses.

Honestly, I went swimming in them this week thinking I could handle it, and then I realized I was swimming in the Atlantic. Tons to see in these verses. We are dealing with eternally divine things. And we're going to have a shot at doing this in one sermon. Some churches are doing this song over five parts over Easter. Mercifully, you're getting the 20-minute version this morning, okay? We're going to see some wonderful things about how God is going to do this.

[10 : 31] Isaiah has so carefully crafted this final servant song in such a way that our eyes are drawn to a central point that he's making about how God will do this. Think of this like a five-layer sandwich.

There's five sections here, and the meat's in the middle. So here it is, okay? And the first and the fifth sections of this servant song, God preaches it.

He says, this is what I'm going to do. And then as we move into the second and the fourth sections, we get the world that watched it. The world watches it and says, there's what we saw.

Wow, isn't God great? And in the third section, which is the heart of the message, which is the meat, which is where the emphasis lies, we're going to hear about the servant who clinched it.

As God says through Isaiah, here's how I'm going to do it. Here's how I'm going to do it. So the God who preached it, my servant, do you see verse 13?

[11 : 37] My servant thunders God. He will be what? Successful. In other words, he's getting this job done. He's going to do this. He will finish this work. And when you see my servant, when you see what he will do, and when you get it, it will blow your minds.

Because in him, and you notice this word here, you will see my wisdom. See that word, verse 13. So God's servant is going to put on magnificent display to the watching world God's wisdom.

Wisdom which will leave even kings dumbfounded. And say to themselves, not only did we not see that coming, but when we saw it, when we saw him suspended on the cross, when we saw him see the descriptions marred and disfigured, in all honesty, it looked like utter foolishness to us.

I was thinking on it this week. If God was to go on Dragon's Den, and think of it like that. If God was to go on Dragon's Den, and pitch his salvation plan to the dragons, and tell them about the cross, tell them about how he's going to save sinful men and women to himself, sinful people, the dragons would look at that and say, that is utter nonsense.

That is offensive. That is not a chance of you getting my investment in that salvation plan. Deborah Meaden and Peter Jones would be aghast, and they'd all be out within seconds.

[13 : 11] But this is God's wisdom. And his wisdom, his ways, they're so far above our ways. I guess in a way that you'd kind of expect from our creator.

In actual fact, his wisdom only goes to make foolish the wisdom of the world. As God says, here is my wisdom. And in his wisdom, he knew that what the people of the world, what we needed most, wasn't a strong leader, wasn't a skilled teacher, wasn't an able negotiator.

What you and I need most is a saviour. It's a saviour. Someone who will sprinkle us. Do you see that word at verse 15? It's an Old Testament priestly word, to sprinkle.

These people would have known exactly what that meant. He's going to sprinkle people. So this servant is going to be the ultimate priest in that he will make people right with God.

And verse 11, he will be the one who will justify them. One of those great biblical words, justified.

[14 : 27] It's a courtroom word. It means that the irrevocable verdict has been passed, that we are declared right before our creator God.

Hear this, treated just as if we'd never sinned, and treated just as if we'd always obeyed. Be of sin the double cure. Hear it is right here.

Justified debts paid, charges dropped, relationship restored. Remember studying the Declaration of Independence at university?

Not the American one. That would have been fun. The Scottish one. 1320, the Declaration of Arbroath. This moment when the people in Scotland, this line in the sand, this moment in history where people said, no, these are the things that are now true for us as a people.

And on these truths, we're going to stand and build our lives. And it's this kind of declaration that God is talking about here. This line in the sand declaration that is true for all those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ is that we are justified.

[15 : 44] It's this kind of thing that is true for all those who have been in the sand. It's this kind of thing that is true for all those who have been in the sand. Line in the sand, moment in history, Jesus has justified us before a holy God. We are right with him. And because, verse 12, do you see, because this servant was willing to pour out his soul to death, God will vindicate him.

So in other words, death may be the road for him, but death will not be the end for him. And there will be life for him. And God will make sure that just as the world publicly saw his humiliation, the world will publicly see his exaltation.

As God said, God says, that is my servant. There is my son. There is my king. And the world will not touch him. And his people will share in the spoils of his victory.

So God preaches this news to this generation living in exile. That's the God who preached it. Here's the world that watched it. Here are the stories that the onlookers who watched the life and death of Jesus and have now come to understand what was really going on and what it meant.

And I want you to hear what they're telling you this morning. Hear what they're saying to you from verse one. What do they say? Man, who would have believed this? Who would have believed this?

[17 : 14] That what we saw was the strong arm of the Lord. You see that in the text? This is God's power. This is God's mighty saving power. And it looked to us like utter foolishness.

That God would demonstrate his saving power in the life and the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Surely that can't be true. We thought.

But praise God it is true. Hear them tell you what they are saying. Feel the imagery. He was like a young plant. Right? We went to the botanics yesterday. We saw lots of young plants. Unimpressive. Fighting for life. Trying to get air. Trying to get light. Just walked on past. Didn't even notice them. He was like a root out of dry ground. You ever dug out a root from your garden?

Yeah? Dug out a root. What do you do with it? You just chuck it in the compost heap. You chuck it in the bin. Why? Because you look at it and you think, well, there's nothing happening here. Nothing I know here.

[18 : 13] There's nothing worth my investment, my working for. So you just chuck it away. This is what they thought about this sermon. This is what they thought about Jesus. Perhaps if his life was one of pomp and grandeur, then maybe we would have clicked, they say.

But we watched him and there was no fireworks to his life. There was no show to his life. There was no fanfare. He wasn't impressive. He was on the contrary. He was unimpressive. And he was despised.

Do you see that word used twice there? He was despised. He was rejected. And he knew suffering. And people wanted nothing to do with him.

And get your head around this one. He was the man of sorrows. Just think on that. Think on that. It's true, isn't it, sometimes that in our world that we look at people and we think up little nicknames for them. As we see how they live their lives, as we see what they do with their days, we look at them and we say, such and such, she is a lady of leisure.

[19 : 21] Don't we? Such and such, she is a man about town. Try and get to the heart of who they are. Well, praise God for this incredible thought that God the Son would step down into our mess, left heaven's glory, and people looked at him and how he lived his life and the nickname that they came up with was that he was the man of sorrows.

What utter condescension. He could not have gone lower. And what this means, friends, is that if you are here today and you are struggling with your sorrows and if you are at the lowest point, then

can I encourage you to lift your eyes and come running to the man of sorrows.

If you are sitting there and you are thinking to yourself, nobody knows and nobody cares, then run to the man of sorrows because nobody knows and nobody cares and nobody loves you quite like he does.

But as far as the people were concerned, no way could he be God's promised king. He couldn't be. Surely, verse 7, he didn't even put up a fight. He didn't say anything. And even though everyone knew he was innocent, he didn't say anything.

What kind of way out is that to go? Never did we think for a moment that there was something bigger going on here that involved us. See, the world watched this moment in utter horror, in utter shock, thinking, surely not.

[21 : 08] But let's finally see the saviour who clinched it. Verses 4 to 6. This is the meat of the song. This is the heart of the message. And there's a rhythm to it.

There's a rhythm to this section. And really simply, it goes like this. Okay? Him for us. Him for us. Him for us.

There's seven couplets here. Look at these with me. Just making this point about what's going on on the cross. Look at with me. Verse 4. Surely he took our infirmities.

Do you see it? He carried our sorrows. Verse 5. He was pierced for our transgressions. Our iniquities, rather.

No, sorry. The punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds, we are healed. And lastly, verse 6.

[22 : 04] The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Seven times. Do you see it? Him for us. Him for us. Him for us.

And what this is telling us is that Jesus Christ is the great substitute for his people. You often hear people in sport talk about how the substitution changed the game.

Don't you? All that things were heading one way. All of a sudden, the substitute came on and impacted the game so much that things are now headed in the completely opposite direction.

If you're a Watford fan, you know that'll happen to you in the FA Cup last weekend. The substitute changed it all. What's going on here is that God is telling us that his servant, Jesus Christ, is the great and loving substitute for all those who trust in him.

And this is maybe the point to ask you to think about as we head towards a close, friends, is he your substitute? Is he your substitute? Because the truth is with our sin, we can only do two things.

[23 : 11] We can trust and know that Jesus Christ paid it for us. Or friends, we're going to have to pay for it ourselves. Praise God that he's provided us with a substitute.

A substitute that did what we didn't ask him to do. A substitute that died for us where we were still God's enemies and says, come to me. Let me just really quickly point out two things about this as we get us to think about what's going on here, particularly as we run up to Easter.

Two things to consider. Firstly, what he bore was nothing less than God's just and righteous anger against our sin that was rightly due for us.

And he took it upon himself the spotless lamb as he endured the agony of the cross. As he says, if you like, Father, me for them.

Me for them. And verse 4, they watched it and they thought he was being cursed by God, which in one sense is bang on the money. He was being a curse as we sung about, but not the curse that he deserved.

[24 : 29] He was bearing the curse that we deserved. Do you feel the force of these personal words and invite you to put your name in here? What did he die for? Our griefs, this is what he bore.

Our transgressions, that word, it just means overstepping the mark. Our inequities, for them he was crushed, for them he was wounded, for them he was cut off.

Some of you might know that Rembrandt years ago famously painted the crucifixion scene. What's fascinating about it, if you Google it afterwards you'll see it, is that Rembrandt has painted himself into the picture.

And he's painted himself, his face, as one of the men who is crucifying Jesus. As if to say in one sense, do you know what, I wasn't there that day.

I wasn't there that day, I wasn't even born. But in another sense, and in a much more real sense, I absolutely was. It was my sin that put him there.

[25 : 35] The old poem, 'Twas I that shed the sacred blood, I nailed him to the tree, I crucified the Christ of God, I joined the mockery. You see, it's at the cross where we see the truth about our sin. It's ugly to God. It's offensive to him. And our real sin, friends, think about this, our real sin put a real man on a real cross and he paid for it.

He paid for it all. So we're going to finish our service by singing he paid for it all. That's what Alex and I do when we get a bill in from an electricity company or the bar, something like that, what we do is when we've settled it, we just write paid in capital letters, big circle, and file it.

It's done. That's what he bore. And secondly, really quickly, see how we benefit. See how we benefit. On the cross, do you see Jesus' last words weren't, I'm finished.

I'm finished. They were, it is finished. One word in the Greek, tetalestai, it is done, it is fully paid for. And our sin, if our trust is in him, has been buried with Christ.

[26 : 42] It went to the grave with him. And it's such an important truth to remember, isn't it, for our Christian lives, because I don't know about how this works out in your life, but I know in my life that the devil loves nothing more than to go grave digging.

And reminds me of the ways of my past that I have fallen. And reminds me of how I fell yesterday. And reminds me of how I've fallen today. And says, what have you got to say for that? Well friends, these verses tell us that Jesus Christ, the one interceding for me at the right hand of the Father, and for you at the right hand of the Father, do you see that glorious thought in verse 12?

Would roar back and say to the devil, see Graham Shanks, he is a mess. But do you know what? He's my mess. And I have paid for him.

And hands off him because he is mine. I paid for all his sin. I didn't just pay for parts of it. I didn't just pay for the stuff that's coming in the last 10 years.

I paid for it all. Past, present and future. He's mine. Because I paid for him. And I once heard of someone who when they first became a Christian was so moved when they read the truth of Romans 8 chapter 1.

[27 : 58] That there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So excited did they get by that truth that they took their pen and they underlined it. And they underlined it. And they underlined it.

And they went straight through the Bible. Pages of the Bible. And they commented to themselves, my Bible was ruined. But my soul was refreshed. This is what God is saying here.

Jesus paid it all. Friends, oh how we benefit. Behold the man upon a cross. My sin upon his shoulders. Ashamed I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held him there. Until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life.

I know that it is finished. And all of a sudden we begin to understand why so many songs have been written about the cross.

[28 : 59] Because it is the power of God unto salvation. And so just as we close, let me take you back to the tension in the text.

Remember this tension? Remember the tension? I genuinely asked that in my own life. How can this be true? How can God be faithful to the promises and yet deal with the problems? How can God be perfectly loving, fully loving, and yet at the same time perfectly just in that he won't just sweep sin under the carpet.

He will deal with it. How can both of those things be true? How can both of them be true without compromising on either one? And the answer is God's manifest wisdom to the world.

God's manifest wisdom to the world. It is the cross of Jesus Christ. Friends, as we close, if you want to see how ugly and serious your sin is in the eyes of our Holy Creator God, then look to the cross.

And if you want to see how outrageously loved you are by your Holy Creator God, the lengths he was willing to go to to buy you back for himself, then look to the cross.

[30 : 14] And so we're invited to come today and sit at its foot and say in wonder, in the words of Puritan Frederick Leahy, who simply wrote, how dreadful and yet how marvelous is this place?

He died so that we can live. That was the discussion around our dinner table on Monday night. And of course, we read about another dinner table discussion in Matthew 26, where in the eve of his death, Jesus eating with his disciples, he took bread and he said, this is my body, broken for you.

And he took wine and he said, this is my blood poured out for you. And in those three marvelous words, where we will finish, and that are the invitation to every single one of us today, is to take and eat.

Come and receive forgiveness and new life because I died so that you can live. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And it's just in the quiet and just before I pray, let me just, let's just have a time of silence and let's be quiet before our creator and then we'll close. Amazing love, oh what sacrifice, the son of God given for me, my debt he pays and my death he dies, that I might live, that I might live.

[32 : 08] Heavenly Father, we just thank you for sending Jesus for us and our prayer really simply is that you would help us this week of all weeks, but every day of our lives, every moment, to grasp the length and the width and the height of your love for us in Christ Jesus.

thank you that he died so that we can live. Amen.