

Good Friday 2023

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- [0 : 00] Folks, why don't you come with me to those verses that we read at the start together in Isaiah 53. And on this Good Friday, let us thrill our souls with the wonder of the central message of the gospel.
- As we swim deep into the very heart of it, as we get it in verses 4 to 6 of Isaiah 53.
- And so as you're turning there, let me tell you something about my dad. So my dad's in his mid-60s now, but something happened to him when he was much younger.
- And I think he'll agree with me saying when he was much fitter. You see, my dad has got a big scar on the inside of his right knee.
- And I remember asking him as a young boy, saying, Dad, how did you get it? And he was 37 when he did it, which is the same age I am. And what happened is that he tore his anterior cruciate ligament playing football, as I understand it.
- [1 : 17] Now, you do that now as a footballer or any kind of sports person, and you're pretty sure that you're going to make a good recovery within, I don't know, a year, 18 months, something like that. So your career's not finished.
- But he's doing this back in 1990, I think it was, right? Despite a good knee operation then, your knee is never likely to be the same again.
- So to this day, my dad still has a passionate love for the beautiful game. But he's hardly kicked a ball since he did that injury back when he was 37. And that's the truth about wounds, isn't it?
- They tell stories to us about how we picked them up. And they come in all sorts of different forms. For my dad, it's physical.
- But we know, don't we, that wounds can also be emotional. Or they can be mental. Or maybe even they can be psychological. Right?
- [2 : 20] Those memories that keep ticking back, playing in our minds. Those regrets that are the proverbial monkey on the back. Those broken relationships that have never quite healed.
- Those bitter words that you said that you just cannot take back. Just like a toothpaste from a tube, isn't it? You squirt it. You cannot get that toothpaste back in the tub.
- Mistakes that even the slightest flashback of in your mind cause you to run a million miles and hide. Here's the truth of it tonight. We've all got wounds. All got wounds.
- And for better or for worse, the thing about all of our wounds is that they can both define our present and direct our future.
- And as you think about the wounds in your own life right now, here's what we're going to do for the next 20 so minutes tonight.
- [3 : 25] We're going to think about Jesus' wounds. And the invitation that he makes to us to come and to allow his wounds to define who we are.
- You see, his wounds are life-giving. And this is what we want to focus on and celebrate tonight. And allow his wounds to define who we are.

Now, in this section of Isaiah, that begins at chapter 40 and runs right through to the end of chapter 55, here is the great tension that's in the text all the way through this, okay?

Feel this tension. This is a tug of war that's going on in this section of Isaiah, right? On the one hand, here's the one team. On the one hand, God has been making some seriously big promises to his people about what he will do for them when they soon find themselves in exile, away from the homeland, in Babylon, and they're thinking it's game over, thinking that God's finished with them.

And he's been making big promises of how, and just taking these promises of how he will pardon their iniquity, all right? Iniquity, sin, transgression, where we've overstepped the mark against a holy God.

[4 : 46] How God is going to make that right? How God is going to rescue them? How God is going to forgive them and remember their sins no more? Promises, and get this, that this God is so lovingly committed to that he can describe his people as being engraved, inscribed on the palm of his hands.

Now, get that. That is how lovingly and faithfully committed it is to his covenant promises and to his people. They are like names inscribed in the palm of his hands.

Now, I remember my kids going through that label-making phase. Right? They just wanted their name on everything, didn't you guys? Lunchboxes, cardigans, bottles.

Now, at this stage of my life, I understand why people have label-making machines. Because instinctively, that's what we do as humans, don't we? With our human hearts, we just want to claim territory.

We want to say things are ours. Claim things for ourselves. But so often it's the case that it's selfishness and greed in our hearts that motivates us to claim things.

[5 : 54] But you've got to see with this God, it's the other way around. It's because of who he is that the gospel is even possible, yet alone true. He is a loving community of Father, Son, and Spirit.

He is love. And it's because of the overflow of that love. That's the thing that drives God's heart. And that's the thing that wants him to make his people his own.

And all these promises, God is saying that his people will not bring them about by themselves. Okay? It's just wonderful, the promises that God is making to his people in this section of Isaiah.

But if you've got promises pulling on the one rope, okay, pulling back at the other rope is the fact that God has been putting his finger on some seriously big problems in the lives of his people.

Their blatant sin. Their just refusal to acknowledge him and his ways. Their hypocrisy. And the injustice that's rife amongst their community.

[6 : 57] And all of that's coming together and making the vilest of cocktails. And that has rightly brought about the righteous anger of a holy God. And so that is the tension.

Do you feel it? Promises on the one hand and problems on the other hand. And so here's what we need to see. Is that God is not sitting in heaven thinking that it's a trade-off.

Right? The God who is outside time is not there thinking it's one or the other. Because his very character will not and indeed cannot compromise on either of those things.

And yet flowing from that, God's eternal intention is to be faithful to both. The problem, friends, is not simply that you and I could not atone for, make up for, our huge debt of sin that we've incurred in the eyes of a holy God.

Right? That's not just the problem. The problem is also that even if we could do that, our hearts are so wicked and twisted that we wouldn't even be interested in doing it.

- [8 : 14] Even if we could, our hearts are so dull that we wouldn't even be interested in that. See, the problem is our desires.
- Our hearts is the problem. Our only hope is in his. The triune God who says, and get this, that he will make salvation spring up from the ground.
- In other words, this is going to be all of him and nothing of us. All because of his grace and his love and nothing because of our merit. All because of who he is.
- It's all about him. And God's answer to that conundrum comes in the form of his servant. How is God going to be faithful to who he is?
- And we get a wonderful glimpse into his heart and his work in chapters 52 and 53. Clock in now if you haven't got that passage open in front of you. But the heart of that passage comes in verses 4 to 6.
- [9 : 21] Right? It's like a sandwich. Here's the meat in the middle. And there's a rhythm to it. And I take it simply there's a rhythm to it. To make it stick in our minds.
- It's why we love nursery rhymes, isn't it? It's why we can, everyone in this room, we can still hum along and know the words to London Bridge Falling Down. You ever thought that's funny?
- Ever thought that's weird? Something that happened when? In the 17th century we still know what happened. Why is that? Why is that? Why do we love nursery rhymes?
- Why do they stick in our minds? Because they rhyme. Yeah? And they make melody that we click with in our hearts and in our minds. And I take it the exact same logic is happening here.
- Because there's a rhythm to verses 4 to 6. You want to hear the rhythm? Here's the rhythm. Really simple one goes like this. It goes, Him for us. Him for us.
- [10 : 20] Him for us. There's seven couplets in this little section. Him for us. Him for us. Now just glance with me and you'll see them. Verse 4.
- Surely He took our infirmities. Right? He carried our sorrows. Verse 5. He was pierced for our transgressions.
- He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace. And clock that for where we're going to land with this later. The punishment that brought us peace was on Him.
- By His wounds we are healed. Verse 6. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Do you feel the rhythm? Do you feel the beat? Him for us. Him for us.
- Seven times. And the truth that's meant to be lodging with the reader. Is that this suffering servant will be the great substitute.
- [11 : 18] He'll be the great stand-in. That's why I love my friends who work with Christians in sport. They love this. Because they love substitutions. They love that thought. It's Him for us.
- Him for us. He is the great stand-in. He is the great substitute. Now, as we consider what we've read in Matthew 27. Let's use it as tracing paper. And put it over Isaiah 53.
- Him for us. Him for us. As we do it, consider two things about what we read in Matthew. Firstly, consider, friends, what Jesus bore.
- For what He bore, and you've got to get this right. Was nothing less than the wrath of God. God's just and righteous anger against our sin.
- The penalty of which was rightly due to us. It was Him for us. Yeah? He took it upon Himself as He endured what we've been singing about.

[12 : 21] The agony of the cross. And says, Father, it is me for them. Me for them. Do you see how at the end of verse 4, back in Isaiah, the people thought that Jesus was being cursed by God.

Do you see? And at one level, that observation is bang on the money. Because He was becoming a curse for us.

He was bearing the curse that we deserve. Not that He deserved, but that we deserved. And these are deeply human and personal words.

Find yourself in them. Like you used to with your old school photographs, right? You used to come out and look for your face. Find yourself in these verses. It was our griefs. And our transgressions.

And our inequities. For them He was crushed. For them He was wounded. For them He was cut off. It was Him for us.

[13 : 28] Some of you might know that famous Rembrandt painting. When he painted the crucifixion scene. And what's fascinating.

You go on Google tonight and you'll find this out. Fascinating about it. Is that this one in particular. If you look at it. There's a funny chap in the middle. You see with a funny hat. And the thinking is that Rembrandt painted himself into this scene.

As one of the men who was crucifying Jesus. As if to say on one hand. I wasn't there. I wasn't there. The original Good Friday. In one sense. But in another sense.

I absolutely was. Because it was my sin that put Him there. It was my sin that nailed Him to the cross. Friends. That.

Is what the old hymn writer was saying. T'was I that shed the sacred blood. I nailed Him to the tree. I crucified the Christ of God. I joined the mockery. It's at the cross that we see.

[14 : 33] The truth about our sin. That it's hideous in the sight of our holy God. So hideous in fact. That it put a real man. On a real cross.

And there hang suspended Jesus the son. Having endured sweat drops of blood. Such was His determination to pay for it. It was Him for us. Him for us.

That's what He bore. I've got to feel the gravity of that. And secondly. Consider how we benefit.

You see on the cross. Jesus' last words weren't. I'm finished. They were. It is finished. One word in the Greek.

Tetalestai. It is done. It is paid for. All of our sin. Has been buried with Him.

[15 : 40] Went to the grave with Christ. If our faith and trust is in Him. He dealt with it. Went to the grave with Him. As far as the east is from the west.

That's how far. He has removed our transgressions from us. No wonder that's such a source of celebration. As you read the Psalms. Here's what I know is true in my own life.

I know that the devil loves to go grave digging. And go into the lockers of my life. And remind me time and time again.

Of the ways that I've failed. And of the mistakes that I've made. And of the words that I've said. And says who are you?

Who are you? To come before this God. Well friends. How patient is the Lord with us? Somebody in this church has said to me recently.

[16 : 41] We need to love the doctrine of. The perseverance of the saints. But we equally need to love. God's. Patience with the saints.

How patient is He with us? How patient is He. And when the devil comes shooting at me. Christ steps in.

And when the devil makes his accusation. Jesus would rally back and say. Hands off. Because I paid for every single sin of His.

Past. Present. And future. And He's mine. And He's mine. And what accusation are you going to bring against Him. That I have not paid for.

And I love Him. And that's what He declares. Over you tonight. Whatever is going on in your life. Wherever you're at.

[17 : 42] Whatever mistakes you've made. Friends. There is forgiveness in. The person and work of Jesus. You see. He is. God's wonderful answer.

His glorious. Loving answer. To the tension. That's in that text. And what is the end result of this servant's work. Do you see it in the text there. What is it?

It's the word. Peace. And the invitation then. Brothers and sisters. Is to come. And see His wounds.

See His wounds. And do you know. I love just really quickly. I love that we find Jesus saying that exact same thing. To one of His disciples.

At the end of John's Gospel. See the wounds. Right. Do you know what I'm talking about? This man called Thomas. Who I always think gets a. Very selective stigma attached to him.

[18 : 42] Actually. Right. What's the central and dominating verb. That we love about this man Thomas. It's the word doubting. Isn't it? But there's way more to this guy than that.

Right. I derive such strength. When I step into his shoes. As I read about him in John's Gospel. Right. Because he appears three times in John's Gospel. Maybe you know this.

But he appears three times there. Firstly in chapter 11. Right. And it's bravado Thomas. It's brave Thomas. Right. Jesus has just told his disciples.

That Lazarus has died. And that now is the time to go to Judea. And to Bethany. To go back. And presumably knowing that Jesus is going towards Jerusalem.

The place where he's wanted dead. Thomas says. Let's go with him. Right. We are willing to die. That we may die with him. It is brave Thomas.

[19 : 39] Right. It's testosterone Thomas. He's up for a fight. He's up for it. And the next place you see him. Is three chapters later. Chapter 14. And Jesus has just dropped the bombshell.

On his disciples. That he's leaving them. He's going to die. And then return to heaven. But he tells them. That they can rest assured. In the knowledge.

That one day. He will come back for them. And take them. To be where he is. In his father's house. Are many rooms. But Thomas can't get his head around it. Can't understand it.

How can we know the way Lord? That's what he's worried about. When you're not physically here. How do we know? To which Jesus says. I am. The way.

The truth. And. The life. So we've moved from brave Thomas. To bemused Thomas. Confused Thomas. He doesn't understand. What's going on.

[20 : 37] And then the third time. That he crops up. Comes right at the end. Of the gospel. Chapter 20. So the risen Jesus. Right. Giving the game away.

For Sunday. The risen Jesus. Has appeared. To his disciples. And they are overjoyed. But there's one noticeable. Absentee. From that group. Thomas.

Wasn't there. He's utterly distraught. He just doesn't know. What to do. Doesn't understand. What's going on. You can imagine it in their dialogue. In his mind. Right. I trusted this man.

I staked it all in this man. I believed what he said. And now look at me. I'm an utter fool. And perhaps it was just a sheer humiliation. That kept Thomas away.

From hanging out with the rest of them. I don't want to be associated with this lie anymore. And all of that spills out in his response. When the other disciples tell him. We've seen the Lord.

[21 : 31] And Thomas says. Unless I see the wounds. I won't believe. Which you've got to say. Makes absolute sense. Does it not?

It's not so much doubting Thomas. As it is logical Thomas. Because if this isn't true. If he has not risen. Then friends. Let me just suggest to you. That you and I are wasting our time massively.

Here tonight. But eight days later. Thomas somehow. Is back with the gang.

Right? Maybe they. They. Pestered him so much. Maybe it was intrigue that brought him back. You can only speculate. But Jesus appears. And Thomas is there.

Now picture the scene. Considering that. What do you think Jesus' first words. To this group. Including Thomas. Who's on Jesus' mind.

[22 : 28] Could have been. Right? Told you so. Right? Not looking so smug. Now are you punk? You had your chance.

You had your cake. Now you have to eat it. But what does he say to all the group. Including Thomas. Who's right there. As he makes a beeline. For this man.

What is his first words. To this group. Including this one fragile. And weary soul. Who doesn't know. Is coming from his going. What does he say? He says peace.

How can he say that? Because he then goes on to say. See my wounds. Touch them. Touch them.

And Thomas does. And he says. My Lord. And my God. This wonderful. Christological confession. That we get right at the end. Of John's gospel. And in doing so. Do you see how Thomas.

[23 : 28] Is John's ultimate proof case. For the skeptic. In other words. Thomas was no gullible man. Thomas was not duped. And if you're in this camp. Which we so often are.

In our western. Enlightened. World. Where we think something. Has to be seen. To be believed. Know that Thomas was there. Well before you and I were. And we can trust.

That this man. Knows what he's talking about. I think something more. Is going on here though. As Thomas sees those wounds. I take it the proof.

Of this risen Jesus. Like a stone. As it hits the water. Of Thomas's heart. And ripples out. Into every single other area. Is that those wounds speak.

And tell him. That everything Jesus said. Is true. That he is the resurrection. And the life. That he is the way.

[24 : 27] The truth. And the life. And because those wounds. Are real. All of my failures. And all of my doubts. And all of my sin. And all of my confusion.

And all of my weariness. And all of my mistakes. And all of my bitter words. And all of my emotions. All of my regrets. All of my fragility. It was him.

For me. It was him. For me. And because he is. Who he says he is. Because there is life. In these wounds. I can know peace with God.

And so likewise. The invitation. That this Jesus makes. To all of us here tonight. Is to come to him. Whatever is going on in your life.

Come to him tonight. Whatever is going on in your past. Come to him tonight. Whatever is on in your mind. Come to him tonight. And allow his wounds. To define who you are.

[25 : 26] And just as we close. Here is a little tester question. To see if. Our hearts really get this. Let me just say.

The Lord has used this thought. Almost like a battering ram. To lower the drawbridge. Of my proud and sinful heart. That is so often in denial. And allow his spirit of grace. To cross the bridge.

Enter in and transform. Here is the question. You ready for it? Friends. Where do we run. When we mess up? When we get it wrong.

Where do we go? Where do we run to? Now the answer to that question. Is going to come down to. Who you understand. God to be.

Is he now in Jesus? Is he a cruel head teacher? Is hiding behind Jesus. Some God that is thinner on grace. And lesser on love.

[26 : 24] Or is he actually. As we gaze at the son. We gaze at the father. Is he a loving father? You see. Here is what it says. Religion says.

I messed up. My dad is going to kill me. Right. Remember those days. I remember them well. When I was a teenager. I have messed up. My dad is going to kill me.

How is Adam and Eve in the garden? Wasn't it? Genesis 3. Hiding in their shame. Blaming each other. Is that your go to? Here is something better.

The gospel says. I have messed up. I need to run to my dad. I need to call him. I need to fall back.

Not on who I am. But who he is. I need to find my identity. In the wounds. That's how you and I will know. If we found our identity. In his wounds.

[27 : 21] Because we understand. That it was him. For us. It was him. For us. That thought. Captured so well.

In the lyrics. That Christian songwriter. Graham Kendrick. Remember him. Penned way back in the 90s. And we finish with this. And so they watched him die.

Despised. Rejected. But oh. The blood he shed. Flowed. For. Me. 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.

Let us pray. And so loving heavenly father. God of all grace.

[28 : 18] Father of mercies. We thank you Lord. For who you are tonight. And we just simply thank you. For sending Jesus.

For. Us. And Lord I pray. That whatever is going on. In each of our hearts tonight. That our fresh knowledge. Of who he is.

And what he has done for us. Oh father. Would it capture and invade. Every square inch of our hearts tonight. Father. Father thank you.

Help us grasp more of the truth. That he died. So that we can live. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen.