Session 5

February 9, 2020

DOES GOD REALLY UNDERSTAND MY PAIN AND SUFFERING?

Isaiah 53:2-9

When living through a difficult, hurtful time, we often hear folks say, "I know what you're going through," or "I know what it's like." Perhaps they really do. Yet in many cases, those supportive friends are simply doing their best to be compassionate and empathetic. But in those difficult times, there really is someone who understands. He loves us, cares for us, promises never to leave us, and really does feel our pain. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). The word "tested" here means more than being tempted to sin. It means "tried." While Jesus never sinned, He certainly suffered! Isaiah's depiction of the *Suffering Servant* gives us some insight.

Christ the rejected (vv. 2-3). As we have already seen, suffering is a part of the human condition. Job reminded us that "Man, who is born of woman, is short of days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). One aspect of suffering is emotional. Few physical darts are as painful as the emotional dagger of rejection. These verses remind us that the full humanity of Jesus included both social and emotional interactions, not all of which were pleasant. Both the construction of the passage and the imagery used are significant. The passage is definitely future; yet the verb tenses are in the past, indicating they are already accomplished. In contrast to Isaiah 11:1, where Jesus will be a "strong rod" out of Jesse, His initial appearance is depicted here as a tender shoot; humble and somewhat disappointing (v. 2). Unlike King Saul, who stood head-and-shoulders above the crowd (1 Sam. 9:2), or King David who was ruddy and handsome with "beautiful eyes" (1 Sam. 16:2), the King of Kings had no halo around His head to set Him apart or beauty in His appearance that would attract anyone's attention (v. 2). He was despised by those He came to save (see John 1:11). The word *rejected* means "forsaken." Job suggested in his affliction that his friends had all forsaken him (Job 19:14); and when Jesus was arrested His disciples did the same to Him (Matt. 26:56). The utter abandonment promised Him in Psalm 22 was ultimately fulfilled in the dark hours of the cross (Matt. 27:46). The *sorrows* of verse 3 can be taken as pain or suffering, and applied to mental as well as physical anguish. His familiarity with sickness (v. 3) is better understood as understanding the *agony* of sickness. The Lord Jesus was held in blatant disregard; He was the kind of person from whom people would avert their eyes and turn away. Such hateful rejection is hurtful to us…and we are guilty sinners. Imagine how awful the pain must have been for the innocent One who knew no sin!

Christ the redeemer (vv. 4-10). One of the clearest, most sacred doctrines in all of Scripture is called *the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ.* In the simplest terms, this doctrine affirms that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins. It was *substitutionary*, because the wages of sin is death, and Jesus died in our place. It is *penal*, in that the full penalty of God's judgment was placed on Christ on behalf of sinners. In other words, Jesus took our sins as well as God's judgement. The Bible is replete with references to this exchange (for example, see 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18 et al), but few passages portray it as vividly as Isaiah 53. Notice all that HE did in these six verses: He bore, He carried, He was pierced, He was punished, He was

oppressed, He was afflicted, He was taken away, He was cut off, He was struck, He was crushed. Now notice on whose behalf this was done. He took upon Himself *our* sicknesses, *our* pains, *our* transgressions, and *our* iniquities. Verse 6 summaries it nicely: "and the Lord has punished Him for the iniquity of us all."

So, does God really understand my pain and suffering? Of course He does. He's been there before.