

A.B. Simpson:

"As many were astonished at You; his visage was so marred, more than the sons of men; so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at Him: for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

"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." (Is. 52: 14-15; 53: 11.)

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah should begin with our first text, including the last paragraph of the fifty-second chapter. It is all one combined picture of the suffering Messiah.

Jewish writers have tried hard to apply it to Israel as a nation and to show that it demands no other fulfillment in the life of an individual sufferer, but after the utmost strain of the natural force of language, such a construction utterly fails to carry conviction to an unprejudiced reader, and we are constrained to recognize this marred face of suffering, this Man of sorrows, this victim of sacrifice, this Conqueror of Satan and sin as no less a person than the Man of Galilee and the Man of Calvary who in the fulness of time appeared on earth and fulfilled every one of these minute predictions in His own person and in His passion and death.

The prophet commences the fifty-third chapter with a wail of complaint against the indifference and unbelief that rejected his momentous message and refused to recognize the arm of the Lord. He gives a picture of the sufferings of the Saviour and the fruits that grow from the blood-stained soil of Calvary.

I. The Sufferer.

Many details make up this tragic picture.

1. The first is His lowly birth. "He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him." (Is. 53: 2.) This great sufferer began His career amid circumstances of the deepest humiliation. He was born of a maiden mother with a cloud of reproach upon His name. His lot was that of poverty. His cradle was a manger. His home was Nazareth, whose very name stood for all that was despicable and was a play upon the words of the text, for "Natsar," just means a dry sprout, "a root out of a dry ground." There seems to have been no natural attractiveness about the person of Jesus Christ in a purely human way. He was a contradiction of the ideals of the flesh, and a disappointment to every form of human pride.

2. His rejection by His own people. "He is despised and rejected of men; we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not." (Is. 53: 3.)

What a bitter trial it was to Moses to come to his nation with high enthusiasm and patriotic devotion, prepared to stand up for them against their oppressors and then to find that they refused to appreciate His services and failed to understand His mission. "Jesus came unto His own and His own received Him not." It must have been one of the great sorrows of His life to be conscious of the intense love which was sacrificing itself for His people and their utter inability to understand Him, appreciate Him or let Him save them.

3. The privations and sorrows of His earthly life. All the elements which constitute man's cup of sorrow filled His bitter draught of earthly pain. He was poor and had to toil for His own livelihood and that of His mother. He was lonely and felt Himself a stranger in a strange world. His life was one of constant self-denial, repression and intense toil, walking on foot again and again over all the land and working incessantly and often with wearied frame from dawn until darkness, teaching, healing, helping His fellow-men. And suffering was so strange to Him. He had never known sorrow before. It was a new world of experience. He was like a land bird far at sea and out of its element. He was like a naked man fighting his way through thickets of thorns. His whole being was open to a thousand sensitive sufferings that our coarser natures know nothing of, and He was indeed "acquainted with grief." Others left Him, His disciples forsook Him, but sorrow never left His side.

4. Perhaps the keenest element in His sorrow was His sacrificial sufferings. "He was made sin for us who knew no sin." "You shall make His soul an offering for sin." (Is. 53: 10.) "He bare the sins of many." (Is. 53: 12). The terrible sting of sin entered His soul. We know something of what it is to be crushed with a single sin and perhaps agonize and pray for hours, before we rise above it and find forgiveness and victory; but on Him there rested all the sins of all the world. They were imputed to Him and counted as His own, and He had to bear their penalty and their poison.

A great writer has said that there are three things in the story of Jesus that are utterly above all human experience. The first is that an innocent Man suffered as no one else suffered before. The second is that an Almighty One was crushed, defeated, destroyed by forces that He could easily have overcome, and the third is that through this very paradox He has won His victory and accomplished His great purpose of the world's redemption.

The question is often asked, "Is it right for an innocent person to suffer for the guilt of sinners?" In answer we may say first that God has so permitted and therefore, it must be right. Secondly, vicarious suffering is the law of the universe. The vegetable world lives by absorbing the mineral. The animal world lives by absorbing the vegetable. The lower animals sacrifice themselves that the higher may live, and even the human race suffers and dies that it may give place to and propagate the next generation. Thirdly, He was voluntary in thus suffering vicariously for others. It would be wrong to compel an innocent person to suffer for the wrong of others, but if he chooses to be a substitute on the higher plane of heroism we have no right to prevent it. Fourthly, the One who suffered for us was not a stranger, but really One of our own race, its federal Head and entitled to represent us. And finally, it was on this principle that the human race fell through the sin of one man, Adam, our federal head. It is therefore in keeping that the race should be redeemed by their new head, Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that Isaiah's picture of the Savior's sufferings represents them as vicarious. "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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Is. 53: 6.) What a picture of concentrated suffering. It is as though one man were suddenly compelled to stand for all the debts of all the people in the world and from every quarter they came in upon him until he was swamped, bankrupt and crushed. It is as though a shepherd had gone out alone to stand between the flock and the wolves, and they all set upon him until they had torn him to pieces and he fell bleeding and dying, but the sheep were saved. It is as though all the burning rays of yonder sun at its torrid noon were converged in a great burning glass into one single point of flame and one sensitive heart was placed beneath that fiery focus and burned to cinders. All our guilt and all the penalty it deserved met upon Him and He sank beneath the awful load, but not until He had met the claim, had canceled the debt and had saved the world.

5. His trial and judgment. "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." (Is. 53: 8.) What a pathetic story the trial of Jesus was. Worn with a sleepless night, His clothing damp with the bloody sweat of the garden, His heart sore with the betrayal of Judas, He is hurried before the council of the Jews and there He has to face the cruel denial of Peter, His own disciple, and the false accusations of His bitter foes. Again He is hustled to the court of Pilate, dismissed to the judgment seat of Herod, marched back again amid the mockeries of the soldiers to Pilate's court once more, and there insulted, belied, stripped and scourged with cruel lashes loaded with nails, until the flesh hangs bleeding from His bones, and even Pilate, moved with a strange sympathy, points to Him as a spectacle of compassion and cries, "Behold the man!" Then amid a hideous carnival of cruelty and scorn, He is condemned and compelled to carry His heavy cross to the hill of Calvary where they crucify Him. Well might He say in the prophetic words of Jeremiah, "Behold, and see all you that pass by if there be any sorrow like unto My Sorrow."

6. His death and burial. "He poured out His soul unto death. He made His grave with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death." (Is. 53: 12, 9.)

Death to Him must have had a touch more terrible than to less sensitive natures, but He gave Himself up to it as an offering and a willing sacrifice. He literally poured out His very life unto death, and the one extenuating feature in it all was that instead of being buried with the wicked, He was with the rich in His death and the tomb of Joseph was offered as the resting place of His lifeless form.

7. But the bitterest dregs of His cup of sorrow were yet to come. These were caused by the Father's stroke. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; you have put Him to grief." For that dreadful moment He stood in the place of guilty men and it was their day of judgment. Therefore upon His single head there fell the judgment stroke which the guilty world deserved. He bore our hell and in that awful moment for an instant His heart was crushed. When our dark hours come to us, we can bear anything if we have His presence. But when death was creeping over Him, and demons were tormenting Him and men were torturing Him, He reached out for His Father's hand, He looked up for His Father's smile and all was darkness and wrath, and He uttered that bitter cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" "He was made sin for us who knew no sin."

"Jehovah lifted up His rod,

O Christ, it fell on Thee;
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God.
Thy bruising healeth me;
A victim led, my Savior bled,
Now there's no curse for me."

8. The travail of His soul. Christ's deepest anguish was inward. He was going through a great soul conflict of responsibility, desire and intense prayer for the salvation of men. The whole weight of the world's redemption was resting upon His heart. It was the birth hour of heaven. Had He failed, hope would have died for every human soul and heaven been draped in mourning. That awful weight was upon Him. All His life long He bore it, but in the last and crisis hour it absorbed His being with the anguish of a travailing woman. The twenty-second psalm gives a little picture of that conflict. There is a strange expression there, "Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog." Who was His darling? It was His beloved Bride. It was the Church that He was holding in His arms from the fearful attack of her foe, and His one last thought was "To save others though Himself He could not save." He did, but oh, the awful cost; what tongue can tell!

II. The fruit of His sorrow.

First as it affects us:

1. It brings us deliverance from sickness. "Surely He has borne our sicknesses."
2. It brings us victory over sorrow. "He carried our sorrows."
3. It brings us the forgiveness of our transgressions. "He was wounded for our transgressions."
4. It brings us salvation from the power of sin. "He was bruised for our iniquity," the power of indwelling sin.
5. It brings us peace. "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him."
6. It brings us justification. "By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many."
7. It brings us His intercession. "He made intercession for the transgressors."
8. It brings salvation for the nations. "So shall He sprinkle many nations."

What a rich and glorious salvation is thus provided, covering all our temporal and spiritual needs, and large as the world itself in its boundless fulness.

Second, as it affects Him:

1. "He shall prolong His days." This refers to His resurrection, ascension and "the power of an endless life" which has been given Him.
2. "He shall see His seed." This refers to His spiritual offspring. There are two races in the world today, the Adam race and the Christ race. The Adam race is doomed. The Christ race is redeemed. Christians are the seed of Jesus, born of His very being and partners of His own life.
3. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." This refers to the great mediatorial work given Him by the Father which is the reward of His sufferings and which He is carrying on with victorious power until His Kingdom shall have been established in all the world.
4. The spoils of victory. "You shall divide Him a portion with the great and He shall divide the spoil with the strong because He has poured out His soul unto death." As the reward of His conflict and suffering, He is to share the spoils of victory over Satan and all His foes. Among them are the restitution of this lost world which Satan had captured for a time and claimed to rule as its lord. Christ has overcome him by the cross and is finishing His triumph through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit, and the vision of prophecy has revealed to us the final triumph when the enemy shall be forever imprisoned in the lake of fire and all the things that he has wrecked shall be restored in "the days of the restitution of all things." Then shall that sublime vision of the Apocalypse be fulfilled, "I saw heaven opened and, behold, a white horse and He that sat upon him was

called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns, and He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God, and, He has on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

5. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." Tell me how much would satisfy your heart for this sin-cursed world, and then I will tell you something of what would satisfy the heart of Jesus. But you could tell me nothing if you were to talk for a thousand years that would even faintly approximate all the joy, the victory, the glory which these words imply for earth and heaven, for our ransomed race and our Redeemer's heart of love. All this He saw as He hung that day on Calvary and the prospect took away the bitterness of the cross.

"He could see the ransomed throng,
He could hear their rapturous song
Rolling through the ages long;
He could see His glorious Bride
Saved and seated by His side,
And His soul was satisfied."

Shall we help to satisfy His soul?