Easter Sunday 4-12-20

Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:10-12

Isaiah 53 is usually referred to as The Suffering Servant. As we read through this chapter, the description of Jesus in His life and crucifixion is inescapable. In this Scripture, the basics of Jesus taking punishment in our place so that we can be made righteous, are shown to us. Here is the prophecy that is unfolded in the New Testament. In the Good Friday service, we looked at verses 1-9. Indeed, these verses describe Jesus’ life, death, and burial. But there is more in this chapter: There is resurrection, there is new life, there is reward, and there is further ministry. As we celebrate the glorious resurrection of our beloved Saviour, it will be good to look deeply into these parts of this Scripture.

Verses 13-15 of chapter 52 are a condensed version of chapter 53. In verse 13 is the command to “Behold”. This is a command from God; He wants us to pay attention. His servant, who is Jesus, will prosper. Jesus prospered by doing the will of the Father; He prospered by bringing many to righteousness.

That word “prosper” is also often translated “act wisely”. This is wisdom from God and indicates knowing exactly what to do in every situation to bring about the result God wants. It is plain in the New Testament that Jesus acted wisely. He was always able to answer hostile questions and avoid traps set by those who were against Him. He was always able to teach profound truths about God and the Kingdom of Heaven.

When Jesus permitted Himself to be arrested and crucified, He acted in wisdom. It would seem to us that He should have freed Himself from His persecutors; but this would not have brought about the desired result. He had to go through with these things in order to bring about God’s will; which is our redemption.

We are also told that the servant will “be high and lifted up and greatly exalted”. These verbs are used in the Old Testament to refer to God. This is a beginning hint, that the servant is God Himself. This is brought out more in the following chapter. Additionally, the word “high” can be “raised”. Our three words can now be applied to Jesus after His death and burial: He was raised from the dead; He was lifted up by ascending into heaven; He was greatly exalted by being given His place at the right hand of the Father.

Verse 14 speaks of the suffering and the humanity of Jesus. We just saw that the servant is God; now we see that the servant is human. Again, we looked at this more closely on Good Friday, but it is very important. Without being perfect God, and without being entirely human, Jesus could not have performed His atoning work on the cross.

He endured horrible suffering; such that people were appalled to look at Him. The physical damage would have been great. How He must have shown His torment during the time He was separated from His Father. But we already know, from the previous verse, that this man will be exalted after His suffering is done. And we know that Jesus trusted His Father and that He would come again into glory.

Hebrews 12:2

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This verse from Hebrews has important application for us. First is to keep our eyes on Jesus. If we start looking at the storm around us, we will sink. The faith He displayed in the Father is our model; His faith was perfect. Ours may not be perfect, but it is enough because it is supplied by God through the Holy Spirit. We, too, will face trials and suffering in this life; we will be shamed for being followers of Jesus. But, like our Saviour, we endure the trials and pay no attention to the shame. The reason is because we know that joy is coming; we will also be resurrected like our Saviour, and our resurrected body will be perfect and never again subject to the ravages of sin.

Back in our verses in Isaiah, Jesus will sprinkle many nations. This sprinkling does not refer to baptism, it refers to a spiritual cleansing. This idea is brought out in some of the Mosaic rituals but is shown most clearly in Ezekiel 36:25.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

This sprinkling of clean water symbolizes an actual purification. It is the cleansing from sin and spiritual adultery. Notice the pronoun “I”; it is God who will accomplish this cleansing. In the following verses of Ezekiel, we are told of receiving a new heart, of receiving God’s Holy Spirit within us, and of being saved from our uncleanness. In other words, salvation. All of this is accomplished only through Jesus Christ. It is He who will sprinkle nations and bring about the salvation of those who accept Him.

Anyone who grasps what Christ has done, and receives Him in faith, will receive beautiful revelation. Even kings will be quiet, so as to listen to One who is greater than themselves. They will see that this man who suffered humiliation and death will have risen again to life and glory. They will understand that it is by His work on the cross that they will gain salvation.

Here again, these three verses give a glimpse of what is explained more fully in chapter 53. On Good Friday we considered verses 1-9 which so greatly focused on His suffering and that He endured it on behalf of His people.

Now we come to verse 10; it appears to be more of the same. God was pleased to crush Him. To consider this by itself makes God appear cruel; He is pouring out His wrath on the innocent. But when we understand what God is doing; we see it for what it truly is: mercy. This is not random suffering, but salvation for those who don’t deserve it. The point is being made clear: to crush means death. The servant died. He died an actual death; His earthly life had ended.

To render Himself as a guilt offering drives this home even more. A guilt offering was a sacrifice that involved the death of an animal. The sacrifice died. Again, the servant would die. But it was important to know that He died as a guilt offering. A guilt offering atoned for someone’s sin; in this case, of all who would accept Jesus as Saviour.

After this assurance of the death of the Servant, we are surprised to read: “He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.” These things are not possible for a dead man. The only explanation is that He is alive. He truly died; He truly lives: a resurrection. This is what we celebrate this day especially; it is what we celebrate always. The resurrection is crucial to Christianity. We do not worship a dead man; we worship a living Saviour.

We who worship Him are His offspring in that He is the one who has given us life; eternal life. He has given us new life as children of the one true God. By adoption we are now children of God; by receiving the new life that Jesus has offered, we become His offspring.

God the Son is eternal; He has existed since eternity past and will continue to be throughout eternity future. This is the deity of Jesus. But Jesus the man had a beginning when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He died on the cross. But He is risen again; resurrected by the power of God. And now He lives forever as a human-being, yet in His glorified body. His days have been prolonged.

All this happens because Jesus was obedient to the Father and because He loves us more than we can know.

It is the good pleasure of God the Father to bring about the means of salvation. And He has chosen to bring it about through Jesus Christ, the Servant here in Isaiah. The promise made here in the last line of verse 10 is fulfilled by Jesus. The good pleasure of God the Father to bring many to salvation, has prospered in the hand of Christ. Countless souls are won for God. Jesus has accomplished this by setting the foundation of the church and by suffering the wrath of God in place of those who will turn to Him.

It is because of the deep anguish of His soul, that Jesus will see these things. His deep anguish is our atonement. And Jesus is satisfied; it is His desire also that we be saved. Jesus and the Father are in perfect agreement in their desire to bring salvation to people. We were created to have fellowship with God; and Jesus has made it so that we can.

The first two lines of verse 12 can be difficult to understand. It helps to know that the word translated “great” is also translated “many”. Considering the work Jesus has done in verse 11, the idea is that His portion will be the many. In other words, He will be a King, and all those He has won for God will be His subjects. God will give them to Him and He will lovingly accept them. We see this in John 6:37.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

And once more; Why will He receive these things? He poured out Himself to death. He freely offered Himself as a sacrifice on our behalf to atone for our sins. He was numbered with the transgressors. Certainly, He was crucified between two thieves. But even more, He became a man; He allowed Himself to be formed in the likeness of sinners in order to gain our forgiveness. In doing this, He bore the sin of many. Each of us deserves eternal punishment for our own personal sins. But Jesus bore the sins of all those who would follow Him. Lastly, He interceded for the transgressors. His first words from the cross were “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He interceded for those very ones who were wrongfully putting Him to death. But this is also His continuing ministry. He now sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for all who turn to Him. He reminds the Father that they are His.

Jesus’ spirit was reunited with His body; and in that moment, His body was glorified by God. Jesus received a body that will last for eternity, because in this resurrection, He defeated death. His work of atonement is complete and perfect; He will never again face torment or shame or separation from His Father. His place beside God is firmly established. The true wonder is, that He shares all these things with us.

As Christians, it is our life’s work, to allow the Holy Spirit to make us more and more like Jesus. We need to keep in mind what that means: obedience to God, loving other people, sacrifice of self, suffering. Everything we see of Jesus in the Bible, we do our best to emulate in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

And, besides eternal salvation, here is the promise we receive.

1 John 3:2

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

Here is why we can tolerate suffering and pay no attention to those who shame us for the sake of Jesus. It is because our spirits will rejoin our bodies; our bodies will be made new and glorified at the moment we share in the resurrection to life. We will finish the process of becoming like Jesus, and actually be like Him.

Prayer

Glorious Lord Jesus, Almighty Father God; Your great strength and power are on display for us in the resurrection of our Saviour. You have shown Yourself far beyond the strength of satan. You have defeated that final result of sin that has plagued mankind since the fall; You have defeated death. Physical death could not hold You; spiritual death could not touch You. Now in Your great mercy, You offer release from death to each of us.

How the angels in heaven must have rejoiced that morning when You stepped out of the tomb. We join them now because our God is alive. And more; He is gracious and offers the same to us. Surely, the sun rose brighter that day; surely, the air was still, in reverent silence, when the Son of God demonstrated His power.

Please accept our meager offering of praise. Holy Spirit, sanctify our prayer; intercede on our behalf by giving perfect praise to the Father. Jesus, we look forward to that day when we see You face to face, and become like You in sinlessness.

We pray these things in the name of our glorious Saviour, Jesus Christ

Amen