

## RUF Bible Study – Attributes of God in Isaiah

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### Isaiah 53-54 – The Servant of God

*Isaiah 53: 3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. 6 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.... 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.*

*54:1 "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD. 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. 3 For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. 4 "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. 5 For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.... 11 "O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. 12 I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones. 13 All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children. 14 In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you.*

Phillip met a man, an Ethiopian man, who was returning from his pilgrimage to the temple. Phillip responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, went up to the man and asked: “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

*“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”*

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

The passage the Ethiopian was reading was our passage tonight. Isaiah 53. That surely meant that he had been reading Isaiah (unless he did the open up the Bible and read randomly method), which means that he had been encountering the Servant Songs throughout the book. Isaiah’s writing builds a case for the Lord’s Servant. Look in chapter 42 and read that he is chosen and God puts his Spirit on him. In 44 you can see that God will bless him with many descendants. In 49 you will read that his ministry will be effective in word and deed, that he will gather his people to himself, and that he will be a light for the nations. In 50, you realize that the Servant will be obedient to the Lord. The case is being made for a leader of Israel unlike any other seen before.

But the Ethiopian man is confused. He isn’t sure who this is. Let’s look ourselves, praying that God will open our eyes and unstop our ears like in 42:10. We’ll see the removal of our sin and the restructuring of our hearts and values.

#### ***The Servant Removes Our Sin***

This is culmination of the Servant Songs, but it ends in quite a surprise. The Servant doesn’t look like he’s going to win. “It is surprising in the sense that all the language about God’s power to redeem and to defeat the enemies of his people tends to condition the reader to expect something in the way of overwhelming power and might. When instead we hear about suffering, humiliation and loss, it comes as a surprise.”<sup>2</sup> Let’s look at why it is a surprise.

First, because the Servant was *repulsive*. We see that where the song begins – 52:13-15. *13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. 14 As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— 15 so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.*

People will be astonished, appalled, shocked, and shattered by the appearance of this man that is so marred it is beyond human semblance. Instead of saying, “Is that him?” People will ask, “Is that a human?”

And yet, this deformed, mangled man will be the one high and lifted up, exalted<sup>3</sup>. It is this tortured one who will sprinkle the nations like the priests. He cleanses the very ones who are dehumanizing him.

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For this series, I used commentaries on Isaiah from Meyer, Webb, Orland, Oswalt and Motyer. I listened to sermons from Tim Keller, Fred Harrell and Bryan Chapell, and used notes from RUF campus minister Kevin Twit and seminary professor Dr. Jack Collins. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

<sup>2</sup> Oswalt, 375, Vol. 2

<sup>3</sup> It seems this is what Paul is thinking of in Phil. 2:5-11

It is this one that we are told to look at. Behold him. Look at him. “If what this passage says about this man’s capacity for taking away sin is true, then by all means we should fix every bit of our attention on him.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, it is at looking at this display of unbelievableness that will make kings shut their mouths – their own greatness is so small that they have nothing to say in his presence and can only fall at his feet.<sup>5</sup>

We next are surprised to learn that the Servant *lived in rejection* – 53:1-3.

This is surprising because the Servant is identified as “the arm of the Lord.” The arm of the Lord is going to save Israel from its sins. We need to stop for a second and say that the Servant is not Israel, as many wish to state in order to wiggle out of the implications of this passage. Israel will be delivered by the arm of the Lord, thus Israel cannot be the arm of the Lord. Israel cannot suffer so that Israel won’t have to suffer.

The arm of the Lord Servant will be despised and rejected, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. This points to the superficial nature of our hearts and lives, and makes us realize that living close to the Servant or to God doesn’t make unbelief impossible. We look on the surface. We make judgments based on appearances. You would not have admired him.

We must have God’s help to believe.

The Servant will be plainly human, and will have a natural growth and a traceable ancestry. He will be unimpressive, not expected, not special, shunned, and misunderstood. The Hebrew word “despised” doesn’t carry quite the emotional quotient that it does in English. “It means to consider something or someone to be worthless, unworthy of attention.”<sup>6</sup> To be thrown away and forgotten about.

This surprises us because of what it says about his leadership style and charisma. “Deliverers are dominating, forceful, attractive people, who by their personal magnetism draw people to themselves and convince people to do what they want them to do. People who refuse to follow that leadership frequently find themselves crushed and tossed aside. This man does not fit that picture at all. We are not drawn to him and his plans; rather we are repulsed by him and them.”<sup>7</sup>

This is shocking also because “not only does he lack any particularly attractive features to draw us to him, but he is full of his own problems. He is not one of the winners, he is one of the losers. It is axiomatic that losers cannot deliver other losers. He is a man of pain and sickness; what can he do for the rest of us?”<sup>8</sup>

“The revelation of the arm of the Lord that will deliver the Lord’s people is met with shock, astonishment, distaste, dismissal and avoidance. Such as one as this can hardly be the one who can set us free from that most pervasive of all human bondages: sin, and all its consequences. To a world blinded by selfishness and power, he does not even merit a second thought.”<sup>9</sup>

So this Servant isn’t measuring up with our conception of a leader. But our mouths really should drop when we next see that *he was our sin-bearer* – 53:4-6.

Jesus was a man of sorrows, but they weren’t his own. They were ours. *He* suffered, but *we* sinned. That weakness and sickness that made us think so little of the Servant – it was our weakness and sickness! He was wounded for *our* transgressions. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

If we don’t know the story, what would you think this means? This is talking about a human sacrifice, is it not? Throwing someone out to die in order to appease the gods. The vicariousness of this should trouble us, for nowhere in the Bible is human sacrifice or one man dying for another, much less a whole group considered acceptable.

Not only is it vicarious, it is vicious. Stricken, smitten and afflicted. Wounded. Crushed. Franz Delitzsch says this word “crushed” or “pierced” is the harshest word for death in the scriptures. It means run through and ripped apart. Why all the violence?

We then see that, the Servant *died in purposeful innocence* – 53:7-9.

The overriding image here is lambs to the slaughter. The silence of the lamb in the face of gross injustice. “The servant who know all things beforehand went to his death with a calm silence that reflected not an uncomprehending but a submitted mind and tongue”<sup>10</sup> This is surely a miscarriage of justice, but is also the Lord’s clearheaded choice He chose not to fight back, which means that he was not overpowered.

But wouldn’t we also call the voluntary nature of his death something else – couldn’t we think that this is really suicide? If he walks into a no-win situation trying to be hero this is sheer suicide which isn’t admirable but futile.

Ah but we finally see that the Servant was *crushed but victorious* – 53:10-12.

We read that all of this happened because of the will of the Lord, and yet, strangely, this one who is killed for sin will – see his offspring and prolong his days and be satisfied. He will get portions like a king, dividing the spoils like a conqueror. He will accomplish his purpose, whatever that is.

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<sup>4</sup> Oswalt, 378

<sup>5</sup> Oswalt, 380

<sup>6</sup> Oswalt, 383

<sup>7</sup> Oswalt, 382

<sup>8</sup> Oswalt, 383

<sup>9</sup> Oswalt, 384

<sup>10</sup> Motyer, 336

“Contrast the vaingloriousness of the erstwhile king of 14:9-12 and this majestic one. The dead (9) is alive (10), the condemned (8) is righteous (11), the helpless (7) is the victor (12).”<sup>11</sup>

Now can you relate to the Ethiopian who didn't understand who this was? “*About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?*” 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Phillip, beginning with this Scripture, told him the good news about Jesus.

Surprise. The Servant is Jesus. You know that, but try to remember that this is shocking. How can this be? But it all fits doesn't it. The lowly birth of humiliation. The exaltation of his resurrection and ascension. The offices of prophet, priest and king. The way he made the sacrifice and also was the sacrifice. The strength of a king and meekness of a shepherd. The rejection he underwent from his own family who grew up with him, from the religious community who knew this text, from the government who hated how people followed him. His courage in the face of the cruelest torture of all time.

Why the viciousness and violence of this death?<sup>12</sup> Because forgiveness is costly. That's true for us too. If you are deeply hurt, you can either give back the hurt and thus perpetuate the problems of the world, or you can take it on yourself and that hurts too. Forgiveness is costly. How much more for God? The penalty of sin is death. Someone has to die for your sin.

The vicariousness of Jesus' death is explained because it is possible to have a substitute pay for sin. This is what was pictured in the sacrificial system. But if you think about it, it is not logical that a sheep or goat or bull could pay for the sins of a person. No, a person has to die for a person. But if it is to work, the person must have no sin himself. That is not the same category of a human sacrifice, because what we're saying is that the person is a human and isn't a human. John 1:29 and Hebrews 9:11-14 speak to this phenomenon.

*John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

*Hebrews 9 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

And the voluntariness of this isn't suicide because Jesus, being fully God, actually is able to lay down his life for another willingly. We aren't because our lives are not our own. He can because he was created before the foundation of time and is very God of very God. That means he is able to die on his own terms for another. Jesus was willing. “He didn't hang from the cross screaming at his tormentors, the way others victims did. Nor did he blaspheme God. He perceived in his torments the saving will of the Lord. This is the mystery of the cross. It was on the instrument of human torture that Jesus Christ made his soul and offering to God for other people's sin. The cross, therefore, was no defeat.”<sup>13</sup>

What is your response to this? At the cross, Jesus achieved the ancient purpose of God with victorious love. At the cross, *your* transgressions were paid for if you are in Christ. At the cross your iniquity was imputed to him, and his righteousness to you, if you are a Christian. He carried *your* sorrows. This is substitutionary atonement

Israel had suffered greatly in this world because of her sins. You have too. There are natural and ordinary consequences to sin. And we mourn about these. But, friends, we have to remember that these are *NOTHING* compared to eternal alienation from God.

What is your response?

One response is, “No, that can't be true. It can't be that simple.” In the song “Oh Happy Day,” we sing of the happy day when Jesus took my sins away. But when Joan Baez sings that song, she drifts off at the end and says, “If only it were that easy.”

Simple? Easy? Jesus didn't think it was “that easy.” This came at a staggering cost to God. We cannot undo our own guilt, and he provided his very own son to be the substitute for the very people who have hated and despised him. That was not easy or simple.

The other response is to believe the gospel. To stop amassing our own imagined righteousness. The other response is to receive and rest on Christ alone. The other response is to cry out to God, to admit our iniquity and transgression and see Jesus dying for us. This is Rembrandt painting himself into The Raising of the Cross. This is Mel Gibson's only appearance in his “The Passion of the Christ” movie. His hand was the one who nailed Jesus to the cross. You did it. But you can be forgiven.

Charles Simeon writes: “In Passion Week, as I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect – “That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering.” The thought came into my mind, What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering to me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly, I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Motyer, 338

<sup>12</sup> These v words come from Tim Keller.

<sup>13</sup> Ortland, 359

<sup>14</sup> Charles Simeon, an Anglican pastor, from H.C.G. Moule's *Charles Simeon* (London: InterVarsity, 1956 reprint), pp. 25-26. I found it in Ortland.

Will you lay your sins upon the sacred head of Jesus? Bernard of Clairvaux wrote:

1. O sacred Head, now wounded, With grief and shame weighed down,  
Now scornfully surrounded With thorns, Thine only crown;  
O sacred Head, what glory What bliss 'til now was Thine  
Yet though despised and gory I joy to call Thee mine

2. What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, Was all for sinners' gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression, But Thine the deadly pain.  
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;  
Look on me with Thy favor Vouchsafe me to Thy grace.

3. The joy can never be spoken, Above all joys beside,  
When in Thy body broken I thus with safety hide.  
My Lord of Life, desiring Thy glory now to see,  
Beside Thy cross expiring, I'd breathe my soul to Thee.

4. What language shall I borrow To praise Thee, heavenly friend,  
For this my dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?  
Lord make me Thine forever, Nor let me faithless prove  
Oh let me never, never Abuse such dying love

5. Forbid that I should leave Thee O Jesus leave not me!  
By faith I would receive Thee Thy blood can make me free  
When strength and comfort languish And I must hence depart  
Release me then from anguish By Thine own wounded heart

6. Be near when I am dying Oh show Thy cross to me  
And for my succor flying Come Lord and set me free  
These eyes new faith receiving From Jesus shall not move  
For he who dies believing Dies safely, through Thy love

### ***The Restructuring of Your Heart and Worldview***

But I said there would be two points here, and the first leads into the second. The gospel, the removal of your sins by the Servant has an effect on you. You aren't just recalibrated and reset back to the beginning. No, the gospel changes everything for you. The removal of sin restructures and rearranges your heart and worldview. How do I know, and how can I tell you this?

You have to read chapter 54 to see how forgiveness changes you to the core. *"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD.*

Sing O barren one, who did not bear. What is that about?

I think you know that motherhood was the essential quality of womanhood in ancient times, and still is in some more traditional societies today.<sup>15</sup> Bearing children was everything. And that made sense. If you wanted to do well, you had to have children to provide for and work for you all through life and in old age. This was your security. If you wanted to have three grown children, you most likely would need to birth ten or eleven, the mortality rate was so high. This was at a considerable risk to yourself, since dying in childbirth was common. So, if you are 20, you would surely have birthed three or four children already. How does that sit with you?

Not only is this good for you, but it is essential for your tribe. If you don't bear more and more children, as many as you could, really, then you would soon be outnumbered and overwhelmed by the tribes around you. Thus, a pregnant woman would be considered something like a national hero. And you would *never* hear a woman say "I don't want children." Or "I think I'll have two." That would be craziness and like signing a death warrant to yourself and your tribe in the future.

But, just like any thing, a good thing is turned into an idol and starts to squeeze and kill people. You see this when Rachel says to Jacob, "Give me children or I'll die!" (Gen. 30:1) That accurately sums up the way an idol controls and rules your life. Give me X or I'll die.

So we would be right to say that this structure oppressed women. But wait a second. These women did not struggle with eating disorders did they? No. We never hear about that. Why is that? Just because they have different idols than we do doesn't mean that we don't have any. Their idols, and this is true of traditional-minded societies today, were of a collectivist nature. Our

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<sup>15</sup> These thoughts come from Keller.

idols are much more individualistic. Freedom, power, beauty, career, status – these rule us. Give me beauty or I'll die! Give me \$75,000 or I'll die! Give me a ski boat or I'll die!<sup>16</sup> Give me popularity or I'll die!

And yet. And yet the gospel, the forgiveness of sins as we look to Jesus rearranges this for us. It presents a totally different picture. A barren woman would be a woman without the ability to have a child. One who never bore simply states the fact, without saying anything about the whys of it. The desolate one is she who doesn't have a chance to conceive because she is without a husband's care. These are at the bottom of the ladder. They are considered nothing.

Ladies, those of you who are college students are in the "never bore" category right now. But some of you may be in the barren category and you just don't know it yet. You'll find out at some point that you are unable to have children. I know many women who struggle with this, and it is very difficult, even in our society. And some of you may never get married. You may become desolate, wondering if you ever will find someone to love you. At the Real Sex conference a few weeks ago, Craig asked the people why they came to the weekend to hear from Lauren Winner and me about this topic. One of the women said with both wit and sadness, "I came to learn about sex and why I'm not getting any."

Of course, some of you will have as many children as you want. Some of you will be fertile Mertles. Some of your struggles may be in thinking that you really can control the number and timing of your children. An idol of control.

You have to see that, whatever your idol, and this is just one example, but the one of the day for women of the day.

Christianity says that the barren woman can sing because – she will have more children than one who has a husband and has children. Surprise! Barrenness and joy can go together because of this restructuring. In fact, the barren woman who is now a mother of many will have so many children, she'll need more room. "Stretch, strengthen" emphasizes roominess and stability. "Spread" connotes a burst of frenetic activity. And "disposses and settle" tells us that the promises from Genesis are happening. "Out of the Servant's work, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant are fulfilled."<sup>17</sup>

The lonely woman will find a husband in her Maker. This is one of the reasons why marriage is such a good picture of the relationship between God and his people, between Jesus and his bride. It's a metaphor of his own choosing. Because there is both a legal and a relational status. Before you are married, you aren't married. But after you are married, you are married. Something legal transpires. And this carries you into a different aspect in your relationship with your spouse.

Before you are a Christian, you aren't one. But something happens, legally in the courtroom of God – this is called justification – and then you change your relationship. You are adopted. You are married. You are forgiven. We aren't lonely any more. Our desire for a companion is met. Our idol of relationship is met with the everlasting love and compassion of our Redeemer, our kinsman who comes to save us from destruction.

And we also see that, whereas we were a afflicted and storm-crossed city, we will be reset and rebuilt with costly jewels. A city built with rubies, sapphires, agate and diamonds would be incredibly strong, amazingly wealthy and unbelievably beautiful. In short, "It is a picture of total, unbroken peace."<sup>18</sup> It is also a picture of salvation as a community experience.

"The hope he offers is not a dreamy denial of reality. It's a promise from God, a promise of costly and lasting renovation. God will replace the church's poverty with wealth, her turbulence with security, and her despair with comfort. It is all his doing and his resources are endless."<sup>19</sup>

Let's go back to our Ethiopian and Phillip. Because I left a few things out about him. He isn't just someone who comes to Jesus, but he is a real person with real problems and a real story. He is a eunuch, a court official in charge of the queen's treasure. All court officials were castrated as a part of their calling. This helped curb the idea of coups and usurping the royal family. What a sacrifice to pay.

So we have an Ethiopian eunuch leaving Jerusalem. He would have traveled a long ways to get to Jerusalem, to get to the temple. He would have paid a great price to seek God, a price that I don't see many people paying these days. He had a passion to know God; he truly was a Seeker if there ever were one.

But he would be going away extremely disappointed. You see, he wouldn't have been able to enter the temple and worship. He was an outsider, a Gentile, but he also was deformed. In one of the "scratch your head" verses, Moses writes in Leviticus 20:16 *And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 17 "Speak to Aaron, saying, None of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. 18 For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, 19 or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, 20 or a hunchback or a dwarf or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. 21 No man of the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the Lord's food offerings; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. 22 He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things, 23 but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the Lord who sanctifies them."*

Crushed testicles means you will always be childless. You are barren. And it means you cannot approach God.

But this man, this Ethiopian eunuch did meet God. He met Jesus, who was crushed for us. Who tore down the barriers to God. Who ripped apart the veil that separates God and man.

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<sup>16</sup> I'm convicting myself on that one.

<sup>17</sup> Motyer, 340

<sup>18</sup> Motyer, 342

<sup>19</sup> Ortland, 367

And this means that this childless man can now have children. Spiritual children. That you can have spiritual children. That we should pray and expect God to enlarge our tents as we give our lives away to others, as we give our status, our money, our creative energy spent on looks and beauty, our careers, our positions - our everything – because of our growing family.

Again, how will you respond to this? The text says, “Sing!” Does this make your heart sing? It should, for this is the gospel. Substitutionary atonement is one of the greatest pictures of love you could ever see.

In Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sydney Carton takes the place of another man and defeats Madame Defarge’s lust for revenge. The novel takes place in the French Revolution, which means people are dying all over the place. Two friends are in love with the same woman but Darnay marries her and they have children. Darnay is accused of crimes and sentenced to die.

Darnay resolves to meet his death bravely. But this other man, Sydney Carton appears at the door to Darnay’s cell. Carton tricks Darnay into switching clothes with him, dictates a letter of explanation, and then drugs him with the substance that he had purchased at the chemist’s shop. He has Darnay carried out and sent back to his wife.

At two o’clock, guards take Carton from Darnay’s cell, believing him to be Darnay. He stands in the long line of the condemned. A poor seamstress, also falsely sentenced to death, starts to talk to him, relating various things that Darnay should have remembered. He tries to keep her off his tracks, but she finally realizes that Carton is not Darnay and asks, “Are you dying for him?” He replies, “And his wife and child.”

Her eyes get really big. She is filled with wonder. She tells him, I didn’t think I could be brave, but if you’ll hold my hand I think I could. And he wasn’t even dying for her. She was just near him and could see that kind of love.

Do your eyes get big when you read Isaiah 53? Have you grown cold at Easter? Can you see this tremendous picture of love poured out for you?

Any type of secular or even religious moralism won’t fill you with wonder. You’ll just shrug off Easter, shrug off the gospel, shrug off the means of grace and say, “Of course God loves me, I’m a good person.” Or the reverse: “Of course God hates me; I’m a bad person.” Moralism, Christian moralism won’t move you in any way.

Likewise, neither will any sort of universalism. “God loves everyone” won’t fill you with wonder. You’ll just say, “Of course God loves me, because he loves everyone. What’s the big deal?” It doesn’t move you.

It’s not until you see the absolute holiness of God, and how he has to punish sin. It’s not until you see the absolute love of God, and how he provides a substitute so as not to punish you. When you see these two together at the cross, when the Suffering Servant dies in a completely unexpected and yet victorious way, then you are totally humbled and totally accepted at the same time. You have a humble confidence that is not normal. You have an unshakable assurance that is uncommon. You are able to shake your idols off and live in a restructured order, a rearranged universe.

You have to see the cost involved in forgiveness. It cost God his son to love you. That has to move you. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. And yet the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Do you have eyes to see? Do you have ears to hear? Is your heart strangely warmed? Call out to Christ.

Sing o barren woman.

What would be like if we really were this way? What if we lived in the kingdom that is to come now? This picture of the strong, wealthy, secure city is one from the book of Revelation, whereby God will restore his kingdom – but that is coming into being now. What if we lived that way, and understood that status, power, position, money, looks, grades, time, whatever are not the currency any more.

Some would call us conservative because of all that talk about sin.

Some would call us liberals because of all that talk about social justice.

Some would call us charismatic because of all that singing. The Bible does say, Sing! It doesn’t say, Think or Write a paper or read a book or go work out. It says sing! Are you singing?

How do you define God’s power?<sup>20</sup> Is it only when he works according to your agenda? If you had been there on Good Friday, watching Jesus as he hung on the cross, you would have concluded that God had not shown up. That’s what the bystanders concluded, if he is God’s anointed, God will rescue him! But the point of Good Friday, what Martin Luther called the theology of the cross – is that when it looks like God is doing nothing, He is really doing His most powerful work. Do we think that God’s power is only at work when He is working according to our expectations or our agendas? The point of Good Friday is watch and wonder. And this is what the hymn-writers understand so well – that there is something about Good Friday that just doesn’t make sense to us. “And can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me?!” “O love incomprehensible, that made thee bleed for for. The judge of all hath suffered death to set his prisoner free!” Charles Spurgeon wrote, “*When I cannot understand anything in the Bible, it seems as though God had set a chair there for me, at which to kneel and worship; that the mysteries are intended to be an altar of devotion.*”

I pray that we, that I, that you, would see more spiritual children. That we would rejoice and sing in Christ alone and care so much about others that we would have to enlarge our tents, get a bigger room, find more space to fit them all in. Maybe you should invite someone to spend time with you this Easter. There are plenty of people who don’t have a church to go to. Plenty of people who are carrying their own grief, sorrow and transgression. Many who are crushed by the weight of their own sin. Some of you. Will you be like Phillip to them? Will you show them Jesus?

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<sup>20</sup> From Kevin Twit

Maybe you should ask the Ethiopian's question, "Who is this man?" Consider this Easter season, this Passion Week, this Resurrection Sunday, that you don't fully understand Jesus. Pray that God will give you a sense of awe and wonder at this spectacular display of love and that you would sing with joy. That you would have both an intellectual understanding of his substitutionary atonement, the sacrifice of justice on your behalf, AND an intense emotional response as this reality is laid upon your heart. How can this be?

And Can It Be? by Charles Wesley

1. And can it be that I should gain An interest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me who caused His pain! For me who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me?

*Chorus:* Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me!  
Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me!

2. He left His Father's throne above, So free, so infinite His grace!  
Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, For O my God, it found out me!

3. Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

4. No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own