

Rediscovering the Cross

“Part 4: Pierced”

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 31, 2019

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** We are doing a series on what it meant for Jesus to die on the cross. One way to understand the cross is through what theologians call “penal substitution.”
 - The word “penal” is a legal term. We talk about the “penal code” of Canada, which outlines our laws about penalties or punishments for crimes. The word “substitute” is something done on behalf of another.
 - So penal substitution means that on the cross Jesus acted as our substitute, taking the punishment that we deserve for our sins upon himself so we don’t have to be punished.
- Christians cherish this great truth. We lift our voices and sing about it.
 - We sing it in the hymns: **“Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned he stood; sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah! What a Saviour.”**
 - We sing it in new songs like *All I have is Christ*: **“And I beheld God’s love displayed, You suffered in my place. You bore the wrath reserved for me, now all I know is grace.”**
- But as soon as we lift our hearts and voices we quickly realize that not everyone is singing along. There are many who cannot stand this biblical truth we call “penal substitution.”
 - In recent years penal substitution has come under strong attack. It began in the academic books and journals and is now appearing in popular Christian books, blogs, podcasts, and magazines.
- This morning I want to do three things:
 - First, I want to identify some of the current challenges against penal substitution. Second, I want to explain penal substitution from the Bible. And then third, I want us to celebrate this great truth.

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES TO PENAL SUBSTITUTION

- Let’s begin by **(SHOW SLIDE 2) identifying challenges to penal substitution.**
 - I am not concerned this morning with challenges that non-Christians make against the cross of Jesus for as Paul says, **“The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.”**
- I am not even so concerned today with the attacks of those who call themselves liberal Christians. Liberals have always denied penal substitution. On May 1, 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick, the famous liberal preacher from New York delivered a sermon in which he complained that many Christians were defining Christianity in terms of certain biblical doctrines.
 - He said, **(SHOW SLIDE 3) “They insist that we must all believe in the historicity of certain special miracles, preeminently the virgin birth of our Lord . . . that we must believe in a special theory of the Atonement – that the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, placates an alienated Deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner.”**¹
- I give you this quote for two reason.
 - First it clearly shows that liberals like Fosdick rejected penal substitution.
 - But secondly, what I want you to see from that quote is that in 1922 there was no opposition to it from within the camp of what we now call “evangelical Christianity.” Evangelicals include groups like Baptists, Mennonites, Alliance, Evangelical Free, Pentecostals, Plymouth Brethren, Church of the Nazarene and many more. In 1922 Fosdick complained that all Evangelicals believed in penal substitution.

¹ <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5070/>

- Even as recently as 1973 J.I. Packer could wrote that penal substitution was a **(SHOW SLIDE 4) “[Penal substitution] is, by and large, a distinguishing mark of the worldwide evangelical fraternity.”**²
- But then challenges rose up against it from within the evangelical family. This is my concern this morning.
 - In November 1993 a conference was held in Minneapolis entitled, *Re-imagining God*. Professor Delores S. Williams said, **(SHOW SLIDE 5) “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all. I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff. . . . Forgiveness does not come through blood sacrifice, but through compassion and solidarity.”**³
- She is using an argument that began with a sixteenth century man named Fausto Socinus. He argued that God has no problem with humanity. He does not require any sacrifice to forgive. He is a loving God and simply forgives. But God’s difficulty is getting humanity to believe that he loves them. So, Socinus says, God sent Jesus to die, not for our sins, but to simply show us how far he would go to prove his love.
 - So the cross has nothing to do with Jesus bearing out punishment. The cross is simply meant to soften our hearts to see how much God loves us. The cross then is not about God. It is about us.
 - Clark Pinnock and Robert Brow echo this idea in their 1994 book *Unbounded Love* when they write, **“We must realize that Jesus did not die in order to change God’s attitude towards us, but to change our attitude towards God.”**
- In 2003 Steve Chalke and Alan Mann released *The Lost Message of Jesus*. It contains perhaps the most provocative words against penal substitution in our day.
 - Chalke and Mann referred to penal substitution as **(SHOW SLIDE 6) “a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offense he has not even committed.”**⁴
 - That is a huge accusation. Cosmic child abuse?
- Perhaps the best example of how anti-penal substitution views are working their way to the popular level is William Young’s bestselling book and movie *The Shack*.
 - The god that Young creates does not believe in punishing sin: **“I don’t need to punish sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It’s not my purpose to punish it, it’s my joy to cure it.”**⁵
 - In our day there is an entire movement within Evangelicalism that considers the substitutionary death of Jesus to be an embarrassment at best and an appalling act of cosmic child abuse at worst.
 - So, have we been off track? Should we rethink our beliefs? Should we rewrite our songs?
- Well, let’s go back to the Bible and see if it actually teaches penal substitution.

EXPLAINING PENAL SUBSTITUTION

- Let’s turn now to part 2 of our message: **(SHOW SLIDE 7) explaining penal substitution.**
 - It is important to state that penal substitution is not the only meaning of the cross. The death of Jesus is multifaceted. For instance, Jesus died to triumph over evil powers. Jesus also died to set an example for how to suffer unjustly.
 - So, there are many facets to the cross but today I want show you that the Bible does teach penal substitution.

² J.I. Packer, *What Did The Cross Achieve? - The Logic of Penal Substitution*, intro paragraph. http://www.the-highway.com/cross_Packer.html

³ Cited in Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, Albert Mohler, C.J. Mahaney, *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology*, 149-150.

⁴ Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 32.

⁵ William P. Young, *The Shack*, 120.

- We saw it three weeks ago in the Passover. The Israelite firstborn sons escaped the judgement of death because a lamb died in their place. We saw it last week in the Day of Atonement. The first goat was slaughtered for the sins of the people and the second goat bore their sins away.
 - But Isaiah 53 reveals a radical new development in the Old Testament that is as disturbing as it is shocking.
- Up to this point God had always said that an animal was to bear the sins of the people. It was an animal that was slaughtered. But now God reveals that He is going to punish all of the sins of his people not in an animal, but in a man. A man will be slaughtered.
 - This man emerges out of the shadows in the book of Isaiah. He is a mysterious figure. He is simply called ‘the servant of the Lord.’ The book of Isaiah contains four songs about him. This is the fourth and final song.
- Jesus identified himself as “the servant of the Lord.”⁶
 - If you want to know what Jesus is about you must know Isaiah 53 for the New Testament writers quote Isaiah 53 more than any other Old Testament passage.
- What we see is that this song pictures the servant as the sacrificial lamb. The very way this song is structured is meant to draw your eye to his sacrificial death. It has five stanzas each with three verses. Most Bibles put a paragraph break between the stanzas. I want you to see that the five stanzas are arranged like a target.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** In the outside ring we have stanzas 1 and 5, which introduce and conclude the song. Stanzas 2 and 4 shape the second ring, which speak of the servant’s life and sufferings. And then at the centre of the song, in the bull’s eye, is stanza 3. Stanza three is in verses 4-6. Verses 4-6 described the meaning and purpose of the servant’s sufferings.
 - So let’s focus on the bull’s eye and unpack it one step at a time.

THE SERVANT IS SAID TO SUFFER ‘FOR’ OTHERS

- The first thing I want you to notice is that **(SHOW SLIDE 9) Jesus, the servant of the Lord, is said to suffer for others.**
 - Oh how the servant suffers in verses 5-6. He is pierced. He is crushed. He is wounded. In verse 7 he is slaughtered like a lamb. He experiences extreme violence.
 - Look back at 52:14. **READ 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.**
 - This is saying that Jesus’ body is beaten to such a bloody pulp that he no longer even looks human.
- But notice the servant is said to suffer *for* others. The language of substitution is absolutely clear. Look with me at the repeated contrast between the pronouns. **READ 4-6 – Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed . . . and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**
 - More literally it reads, **“Surely our griefs – he bore them, and our sorrows – he suffered them.”**
 - Isaiah is labouring the theme of substitution here in order that there might be no doubt. Whatever the servant is suffering for, He is doing it for others.

THE SERVANT WILL BRING GREAT BENEFIT TO THOSE FOR WHOM HE SUFFERS

- The second thing that we learn is that **(SHOW SLIDE 10) Jesus, the servant of the Lord, will bring great benefit to those for whom he suffers.**

⁶ For instance, on the night before his crucifixion Jesus quoted Isaiah 53 saying, “It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”

- Look at verse 5. **READ 5b** - *upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*
 - Here penal substitution is stated so clearly I don't know how anyone can avoid it. We were supposed to be chastised or punished but because the servant was punished instead. He gets punishment. We get peace. He is wounded. We are healed.

THE SERVANT WAS PUNISHED BY GOD HIMSELF

- The third thing we see is: **(SHOW SLIDE 11) Jesus, the servant of the Lord, was punished by God Himself.** This may be shocking to you.
 - **READ 6** - *the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Verse 10 says the same thing. **READ 10a** - *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief.*
- When Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* was released *Newsweek* magazine made a cover with Jim Caviezel as the bloodied and battered Christ. The blaring headline read, **"Who really killed Jesus?"**
 - Well it is Pilate, Herod, the soldiers, and the Jewish leaders and people of that time who are morally responsible for the deed. But behind all of this is the plan of God. As Romans 8 says, **"God did not spare his Son but gave him up for us all."**
- It is so strange then to hear Clark Pinnock and Robert Brow, opponents of penal substitution, write the following words: **(SHOW SLIDE 12) "[Penal substitution] makes things sound as if God wanted Jesus to die and predestined Pilate and Caiaphas to make it happen. Surely not—Jesus is God's beloved Son. The Father and the Son are not divided or in opposition."**⁷
 - No, the Father and Son are not divided or in opposition. But yes, God wanted Jesus to die and predestined people to do it. That is exactly what Acts 4:27-28 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 13) "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."**
 - The Bible is plain: Jesus, the servant of the Lord, was punished by God Himself.
- But doesn't this just solidify Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's accusation that penal substitution pits the Father against the Son? Doesn't this make God the Father a wrathful deity who beats his poor son to death? Isn't this an act of cosmic child abuse? No. All of these are misunderstandings.

THE SERVANT SUFFERED WILLINGLY AND DELIBERATELY

- The fourth thing we see is that **(SHOW SLIDE 14) Jesus, the servant of the Lord, suffered voluntarily and intentionally.**
 - **READ 4** - *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.* He intentionally took our griefs. He intentionally took up and carried our sorrows. He did it on purpose.
 - In verse 12 God says he will exalt His servant. Why? Because he voluntarily poured out his life and bore the sin of many.
- So it is a terrible mischaracterization to call this "child abuse." Child abuse involves inflicting pain on an unwilling child. But this is a man who intentionally suffers and willingly lays down his life.
 - In the third servant song in Isaiah 50 the servant says, **(SHOW SLIDE 15) I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.**
 - Or, as Jesus said in John 10:18: **(SHOW SLIDE 16) No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."**
- So you must never think that Jesus suffered against his will at the hands of an angry Father. No, Jesus voluntarily and intentionally laid down his life.

⁷ Clark Pinnock and Robert Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 102.

- Likewise, you must never think of Jesus as the good Son who loves us and who saves us from the mean and angry Father. No! It was out of love that God the Father sent the Son: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.”**
 - Salvation is the work of the whole Trinity working together in different roles. God the Father loved us so much that He sent the Son. The Son loved us so much that he voluntarily laid down his life. And the Spirit loves us so much that he gives us spiritual life to belief in Jesus and be saved.
- To summarize so far then, we have said that the servant suffered for others, that his suffering somehow rescued us from punishment, that it was God who punished Him, and that he willingly and deliberately took this punishment.
 - But now we come to the heart of it all. Why would God punish His servant?

THE SERVANT WAS NOT PUNISHED FOR HIS OWN SIN FOR HE WAS SINLESS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 17) Fifth, Jesus, the servant of the Lord, was not punished for His own sin for He was sinless.**
 - Look again at verse 4. **READ 4 – we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.** That is to say that when people looked at Jesus suffering so brutally they thought, **“Surely this man must have done something wicked for God to punish him so brutally.”**
 - But this is not the case. Look at verse 9. **READ 9 – he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.** Likewise, verse 11 calls him, **“the righteous one.”**
- So this raises the biggest question of the day? If Jesus, the servant of the Lord, was innocent and blameless, why would God punish him so severely? This is where Socinus and his modern-day followers come in. Remember, they say Jesus’ death was not about being punished for sins. They say, he died simply to show us how much God loves us so we would turn back to him. But that is not a demonstration of love at all. Why not?
 - Imagine you and I are walking along Douglas Street. You say to me, **“Barton, I just want to show you how much I love you.”** And with those words you throw yourself out into traffic and are killed. Would I say, **“Oh how he loved me”** or **“Oh how she loved me?”** Hardly. I would think you were insane.
 - But what if I tripped on a bad section of sidewalk and fell toward the road. As I start to fall you reach out and pull me back. But in the same motion you fall into traffic and are killed. What would I say then?
- With tears and thanksgiving I would tell everyone, **“Oh how he loved me! Oh how she loved me!”** Such an act reveals the extreme heights of love because it accomplished something. Your self-sacrifice saved me from perishing.
 - Listen, if Jesus’ death did not accomplish anything except to say, **“I love you and so I killed myself to prove it”** then it is not loving at all. So, what did Jesus’ death under the punishment of God accomplish?
 - We are now at the heights of love and the mountain peak of this morning’s message.

THE SERVANT SUFFERED NOT FOR HIS SINS BUT FOR THE SINS OF OTHERS

- In our final point then **(SHOW SLIDE 18) Jesus, the servant of the Lord, suffered not for His own sins but for the sins of others.**
 - In verse 4 we thought it was for his own sins that the servant was smitten and afflicted. He was not pierced for his own transgression. Look at verse 5: He was pierced for *our* transgressions.
- And look at verse 6. **READ 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.** It is not a complement to be called a sheep. Sheep are dumb and dirty animals. They wander from the shepherd and get themselves killed.

- Here is the essence of sin: we have each turned away from God to our own ways. But we read that the Lord has laid all of our sins, our iniquities, on Jesus and punished him instead.
 - In past weeks we saw how the Passover Lamb or the Goats took the punishment the people deserved. But here it is not an animal who bears our punishment. It is a person. And not just any person. It is the sinless and innocent Son of God who voluntarily and intentionally dies in our place so that we might escape punishment.

CELEBRATING PENAL SUBSTITUTION

- This leads us to part 3: **(SHOW SLIDE 19) Celebrating penal substitution.**
 - Celebrate his death for you. Make it personal like Paul when he says, ***“The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.”*** Make it personal and sing, ***“In my place condemned he stood. Hallelujah, what a Savior”***
- During WWII Ernest Gordon was a British captive in a Japanese prison camp in Burma. The POW’s were tortured, starved, and worked to the point of exhaustion. Nearly 16,000 died.
 - Gordon describes one occasion when, at the end of a workday, the tools were being counted before the prisoners returned to their quarters. A guard declared that a shovel was missing. He began to rant and rave, demanding to know which prisoner had stolen it. He commanded that the guilty party step forward and take his punishment. No one stepped forward. ***“All die!”*** the guard shrieked. ***“All die!”*** He lifted his rifle and aimed it at the prisoners.
 - At that moment, one man stepped forward. Standing at attention he calmly declared, ***“I did it.”*** The guard rushed the man and clubbed him to death. As his friends carried away his lifeless body the shovels in the tool shed were recounted. They were all there. Not one shovel was missing.
- What a heroic act of self-sacrifice. This man substituted himself for all his fellow prisoners. Jesus, the servant of the Lord, gave his life up for us all.
 - But this illustration fails to fully capture Jesus’ death. For you see, we are not innocent prisoners. In our case, the shovel was missing and we have committed crimes against our Creator. And God is not a deranged guard. God is perfectly just Judge who must punish crimes.
 - But out of love for us, God sent Jesus. Jesus voluntarily stepped forward and took the punishment that we deserve. Oh what love! I John 4:9: ***“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”***
- Oh Jesus, ***“You are worthy . . . for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.***
 - And we cry out to you with joy and thanksgiving saying, ***“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”***