

Christ a Man of Sorrows.

by Edward Payson

Christ is a Man of Sorrows, who suffered greatly for our sins, to atone for our transgressions and to make us right with God.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:3, Matthew 26:67, Luke 23:34, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:23

Topics: "Christ's Suffering", "Atonement"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the prophetic description of the character, life, and sufferings of Jesus Christ in Isaiah 53, emphasizing how Christ truly bore our griefs and sorrows, enduring immense suffering for our sins. Payson highlights the intense pain Christ experienced from living in a sinful world, surrounded by depravity, and the rejection and cruelty he faced from those he came to save. He delves into Christ's meekness and patience during his sufferings, portraying the depth of his love and forgiveness even towards his persecutors. Payson concludes by urging listeners to reflect on Christ's sacrifice, inviting them to come to the table of the Lord and not reject the man of sorrows who bore their sins.

Transcript

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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 hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a Lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth"

Isaiah 53:3-7

this chapter, my friends, we have a prophetic description of the character, life and sufferings of our Saviour. So full, so particular, and so clear is this description, so exactly does it correspond with the events which it foretells, that it seems to be a history rather than a prophecy; and had we not the most satisfactory evidence of its being penned some hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, we should be tempted to suspect that it was forged after his death, and that the writer only related the circumstances which he pretended to foretell.

In that portion of this remarkable prophecy which has been read as our text, there are several particulars deserving of attention. A few remarks upon each of these particulars will compose the present discourse. I. It is here predicted, that Christ should be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. That this prediction was literally fulfilled, no one, who has ever read the history of his sufferings, need be told. It may, however, be necessary here to correct a mistake, which has deprived this man of sorrows of much of that sympathy, which his unexampled sufferings would otherwise have excited.

It has been supposed by many, that his sufferings were rather apparent than real; or at least, that his abundant consolations, and his knowledge of the happy consequences which would result from his death, rendered his sorrows comparatively light, and almost converted them to joys. But never was supposition more erroneous. Jesus Christ was as truly a man, as either of us, and, as man, he was as really susceptible of grief, as keenly alive to pain and reproach, and as much averse from shame and suffering, as any of the descendants of Adam.

As to divine consolations and supports, they were at all times bestowed on him in a very sparing manner, and in the season of his greatest extremity entirely withheld; and though a knowledge of the happy consequences, which would result from his sufferings, rendered him willing to endure them, it did not, in the smallest degree, take off their edge, or render him insensible to pain. No, his sufferings, instead of being less, were incomparably greater than they appeared to be.

No finite mind can conceive of their extent; nor was any of the human race ever so well entitled to the appellation of the Man of Sorrows, as the man Christ Jesus. His sufferings began with his birth, and ended but with his life. In the first place, it must have been exceedingly painful to such a person as Christ, to live in a world like this. He was perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled. Of course, he could not look on sin, but with the deepest abhorrence. It is that abominable thing which his soul hates.

Yet during the whole period of his residence on earth, he was continually surrounded by it, and his feelings were every moment tortured with the hateful sight of human depravity. How much sorrow the sight occasioned him, we may in some measure learn from the bitter complaints which similar causes extorted from David, Jeremiah, and other ancient saints. They describe, in the most striking and pathetic language, the sufferings which they experienced from the prevalency of wickedness around them, and often wished for death to relieve them from their sufferings.

But the sufferings of Christ from this cause were incomparably greater than theirs. He was far more holy than they, his hatred of sin incomparably more intense, and the sight of it proportionally more painful. In consequence of his power of searching the heart, he saw unspeakably more sin in the world, than any mere man could discover. We can discover sin only when it displays itself in words and actions. But he saw all the hidden wickedness of the heart, the depths of that fountain of iniquity; from which all the bitter streams of vice and misery flow.

Every man that approached him was transparent to his eye. In his best friends he saw more sin than we can discover in the most abandoned reprobates. He saw also, in a far clearer light than we can do, the dreadful consequences of sin, the interminable miseries to which it is conducting the sinner; and his feelings of compassion were not blunted by that selfish insensibility which enables us to bear with composure the sight of human distress. On the contrary, he was all sympathy, compassion, and love.

He loved others as himself, and therefore felt for the sufferings of others as for his own. If Paul could say, who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? much more might Christ. In this, as well

as in a still more important sense, he took upon himself our griefs; and bore our sorrows. As he died for all, so he felt and wept for the sufferings of all. The temporal and eternal calamities of the whole human race, and of every individual among them, all seemed to be collected and laid upon him.

He saw at one view the whole mighty aggregate of human guilt and human wretchedness; and his boundless benevolence and compassion made it by sympathy all his own. It has been said by philosophers, that if any man could see all the misery which is daily felt in the world, he would never smile again. We need not wonder then that Christ, who saw and felt it all, never smiled, though he often wept. We may add, that the perfect contrast between the heavens which he had left, and the world into which he came, rendered a residence in the latter peculiarly painful to his feelings.

In heaven he had seen nothing but holiness and happiness and love. In this world, on the contrary, he saw little but wickedness and hatred and misery, in ten thousand forms. In heaven he was crowned with glory and honor and majesty, and surrounded by throngs of admiring, adoring angels. On earth, he found himself plunged in poverty, wretchedness and contempt, and surrounded by malignant, implacable enemies. My friends, think of a prince, educated with care and tenderness in his father's court, where he heard nothing but sounds of pleasure and praise, and saw nothing but scenes of honor and magnificence, sent unattended to labor as a slave in a rebellious province, where himself and his father were hated and despised; think of a person of the most delicate and refined taste, going from the bosom of his family and the magnificent abodes of a polished city, to spend his life in the filthy huts of the most degraded and barbarous savages, and compelled daily to witness the disgusting scenes of cruelty and brutality which are there exhibited; think of a man endowed with the tenderest sensibility, compelled to live on a field of battle, among the corpses of the dead and the groans of the dying, or shut up for years in a madhouse with wretched maniacs, where nothing was to be heard but the burst of infuriated passions, the wild laugh of madness and the shrieks and ravings of despair.

Think of these instances, and you will have some conception, though but a faint one, of the scenes which this world presented to our Saviour, of the contrast between it and the heaven he left, of the sorrows which embittered every moment of his earthly existence, and of the love which induced him voluntarily to submit to such sorrows. Another circumstance which contributed to render our Saviour a man of sorrows, and his life a life of grief, was the reception he met with from those whom he came to save.

Had they received him with that gratitude and respect which he deserved, and permitted him to rescue them from their miseries, it would have been some alleviation of his sorrows. But even this alleviation was in a great measure denied him. Some few, indeed, received him with affection and respect, though even they often grieved him by their unkindness and unbelief; but by far the greater part of his countrymen he was treated with the utmost cruelty and contempt. Many of them would not allow him even to remove their bodily diseases, and still greater numbers were unwilling that he should save them from their sins.

Now to a noble, ingenuous mind, nothing is so cutting, so torturing as such conduct. To see himself despised, slandered and persecuted with implacable malice, by the very beings whom he was laboring to save; to see all his endeavors to save them, frustrated by their own incorrigible folly and wickedness; to see them by rejecting him filling up to the brim their cup of criminality and wrath, and sinking into eternal perdition within reach of his vainly-offered hand, --to see this, must have been distressing indeed.

Yet this Christ saw. Thus he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; and how deeply it affected him, we may infer from the fact, that though his own sufferings never wrung from him a tear, he

once and again wept in the bitterness of his soul over rebellious Jerusalem, exclaiming, O that thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes! Another circumstance that threw a shade of gloom and melancholy over our Saviour's life, was his clear view, and constant anticipation of the dreadful agonies in which it was to terminate.

He was not ignorant, as we happily are, of the miseries which were before him. He could not hope, as we do, when wretched to day, to be happier tomorrow. Every night, when he lay down to rest, the scourge, the crown of thorns, and the cross, were present to his mind; and on these dreadful objects he every morning opened his eyes, and every morning saw them nearer than before. Every day was to him like the day of his death, of such a death too, as no one ever suffered before or since.

How deeply the prospect affected him, is evident from his own language: I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Such, my friends, are the circumstances which prove that our Saviour was, during life, a man of sorrows. Of the sorrows of his death we shall say nothing. The bitter agonies of that never-to-be-forgotten hour, the torturing scourge, the lacerating nails, and the racking cross we shall pass in silence. Nor shall we now bring into view the tenfold horrors which overwhelmed his soul, rendering it exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.

These we have often attempted to describe to you, though here description must always fail. Enough has been said to show the justice of that exclamation which the prophet utters in the person of Christ: Behold and see, all ye that pass by, if there be any sorrow like my sorrow. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to pity, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none. 2. We have in this prophetic passage an account of our Saviour's conduct under the pressure of these sorrows.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. Never was language more descriptive of the most perfect meekness and patience; never was prediction more fully justified by the event than in the case before us. Christ was indeed led as a lamb to the slaughter. Silent, meek and unrepining, he stood before his butchers, at once innocent and patient as a lamb.

No murmurs, no complaints, no angry recriminations escaped from his lips. If they were opened, it was but to express the most perfect submission to his Father's will, and to breathe out prayers for his murderers. Yes, even at that dreadful moment, when they were nailing him to the cross, when nature, whose voice will at such a time be heard, was shuddering and convulsed in the prospect of a speedy and violent death; when his soul was tortured by the assaults of malignant fiends, and his Father's face hidden from his view; even then he possessed his soul in patience to such a degree, as to be able to pray for his murderers.

My friends, we must attempt to bring the scene more fully to your view. Come with us, a moment, to Calvary. See the meek sufferer, standing with hands fast bound in the midst of his enemies; sinking under the weight of his cross, and lacerated in every part by the thorny rods with which he had been scourged. See the savage, ferocious soldiers seizing with rude violence, his sacred body, forcing it down upon the cross, wresting and extending his limbs, and with remorseless cruelty forcing through his hands and feet the ragged spikes which were to fasten him on it.

See the Jewish priests and rulers watching with looks of malicious pleasure the horrid scene, and attempting to increase his sufferings by scoffs and blasphemies. Now contemplate attentively the countenance of the wonderful sufferer, which seems like heaven opening in the midst of hell, and tell me what it expressed. You see it indeed full of anguish, but it expresses nothing like impatience, resentment

or revenge. On the contrary, it beams with pity, benevolence and forgiveness.

It perfectly corresponds with the prayer, which, raising his mild, imploring eye to heaven, he pours forth to God: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do! Christian, look at your Master, and learn how to suffer. Sinner, look at your Saviour, and learn to admire, to imitate, and to forgive. But why, it may be naturally asked, why is this patient innocent sufferer thus afflicted? Why, in his life, in his death, is he thus emphatically a man of sorrows? To this question our text returns an answer, and an answer which ought to sink deep into our hearts; for in it we are all most deeply interested: He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; by his stripes we are healed.

We all like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Here, my friends, we see the true cause of our Saviour's unparalleled sufferings. He was cut off, says the prophet, but not for himself. He knew no sin, but he was made sin, made a curse for us. We have all strayed from the path of duty. Yes, you and I, and all our race, have forsaken the God that made us, and chosen the path that leads to hell. God's violated law condemned us to die.

Justice demanded the execution of the sentence. There was apparently no remedy. It is true that God, as our Creator and Father, was sufficiently inclined to spare us; but truth and justice forbade him to do it, unless a suitable atonement could be found. There was but one individual in the universe who could make such an atonement, and that being, prompted by infinite compassion, offered himself for this purpose. The Father, with equal love, accepted the offer. To carry it into effect, the Son assumed our nature, and appeared on earth; and the bitter cup, which the divine law condemned us to drink, was put into his hand, and he drank it to the last drop.

We were condemned to live a life of sorrow and pain, and therefore he lived such a life. We were condemned to shame and everlasting contempt; and therefore he hid not his face from shame and spitting. We were condemned to die under the curse; and therefore he died the accursed death of the cross: We were condemned to lose the favor and endure the wrath of God; and therefore Christ was forsaken by his Father in the agonies of death. We were condemned to perish without mercy; and therefore Christ had no mercy, no pity shown him in his last moments.

We were condemned to remain under the power of death, till by satisfying divine justice we could restore ourselves to life; and therefore Christ remained in the grave till he had made full satisfaction, and then resumed the life he had laid down. Thus he bore our sins, or, what is the same, the punishment of our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead unto sin, might live unto God. Lastly, our text describes the manner in which Christ was treated, when he thus came as a man of sorrows to atone for our sins.

He is despised and rejected of men. We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. How literally this prediction was fulfilled, we have already seen. Yet who but an inspired prophet would have predicted that such would be the reception of such a person, coming from heaven on such a design? We should naturally expect that he would be received with the most lively emotions and demonstrations of grateful joy, by the beings whom he came to save. Even after we were told that, instead of thus receiving, they rejected and condemned him, we should have expected that when they saw his lamb-like patience and meekness, and heard him praying for his murderers, they would have relented and spared him.

And when this could not prevail, we should have hoped that the miracles which attended his crucifixion, and especially his resurrection from the dead, would convince them of their error, and cause them to relent. But none of these things, nor all of them united, could conquer the inveterate malice of his enemies. Living and dying, rising and reigning, he was still despised and rejected of men. Neither his miracles, nor his sorrows, nor his meekness, nor his patience, could shield him from hatred and contempt.

But what was his crime? What had he done? I answer, he was good; he dared to speak the truth; he reproved men for their sins, he testified to the world that its deeds were evil; above all, he bore the image of God, of that God whom sinners hate. These were crimes never to be forgiven; crimes, for which nothing but his blood could atone; crimes, which in their view rendered him unworthy of that commiseration which men usually feel for the vilest malefactors when in the agonies of death.

Nor were those who treated him in this manner, worse than the rest of mankind. As in water, face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man. The truth of this assertion is abundantly proved by the manner in which all succeeding generations have treated Christ. He has always been despised and rejected of men; and he is so still. It is true, he has long since ascended to heaven, and therefore cannot be the immediate object of their attacks. But his gospel and his servants are still in the world; and the manner in which they are treated, is sufficient evidence, that the feelings of the natural heart toward Christ are not materially different from those of the Jews.

His servants are hated, ridiculed and despised, and his gospel is rejected, and his institutions slighted. Wait but a few moments, my friends, and you will see many of this assembly treating him in this manner. You will see the passages leading from this house thronged, like the broad road, with persons who are crowding away from Christ, disobeying his dying command, refusing to commemorate his death; and thus proving that the Saviour is still, as formerly, despised and rejected of men, that the language of their hearts still is, we will not have this man to reign over us.

I am aware that many will be displeased with this interpretation of their conduct; but, my friends, it is impossible to interpret it in any other way. Every man, who voluntarily neglects to confess Christ before men, and to commemorate his dying love, must say, either that he does not choose to do it, or that he is not prepared to do it. Now if a man says, I do not choose to confess Christ, he certainly rejects him. If he does not choose to remember Christ, he certainly chooses to forget him.

If he is unwilling to bind himself to live such a life, as a profession of religion requires, he certainly loves sin better than he does his Saviour. On the other hand, if any one shall say, I wish to come to the table of Christ, but am not prepared, he expressly avows himself an enemy of Christ, for all his friends are fully prepared to approach his table; and those who are not his friends are his enemies; for Christ has said, He that is not with me is against me. For a man to say, I am not prepared to come to Christ's table, is the same as to say, I do not repent of sin, I do not believe in or love Christ; I am not willing to live a prayerful, watchful, religious life.

Nor are those who come to Christ's table without obeying his commands, less guilty of rejecting Christ. We find in the parable of the marriage, that he who came in without a wedding garment was excluded, as well as those who refused to come. To sum up all in a word, it is certain that all who do not receive the instructions of Christ with the temper of a little child, reject him, as a prophet. All who do not trust in his merits alone for salvation reject him as a Saviour; and all who do not habitually and sincerely obey his commands, reject him as a king. This being the case, the conduct of multitudes among us fully justifies us

in asserting, that Christ is still despised and rejected of men. APPLICATION

1. Was Christ a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Then, my Christian friends, we need not be surprised or offended, if we are often called to drink of the cup of sorrows; if we find the world a vale of tears. This is one of the ways in which we must be conformed to our glorious Head. Indeed, his example has sanctified grief, and almost made it pleasant to mourn. One would think, that Christians could scarcely wish to go rejoicing through a world which their Master passed through mourning. The path in which we follow him is bedewed with his tears and stained with his blood. It is true, that from the ground thus watered and fertilized many rich flowers and fruits of paradise spring up to refresh us, in which we may and ought to rejoice. But still our joy should be softened and sanctified by godly sorrow. When we are partaking of the banquet which his love has spread for us, we should never forget how dearly it was purchased.

"There's not a gift his hand bestows,

But cost his heart a groan."

The joy, the honor, the glory through eternity shall be ours; but the sorrows, the sufferings, the agonies which purchased them were all his own. 2. Was Christ wounded for our transgressions; were the iniquities of all his people laid upon him; then surely, my Christian friends, our iniquities shall never be laid upon us. He has borne and carried them away. He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Away then with all guilty unbelieving fears; and come, washed in the blood and clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and feast with him at his table.

Come and see how your salvation was effected; come and look at the fountain whence your present, your eternal happiness flows. In this ordinance you see Christ wounded, bruised, and put to grief for your sins. You see him groaning, sinking, dying under your guilt, under that curse which you deserved to have borne. Come then, sympathize with your sorrowing Master in his sufferings. Come and look at this great sight, till sin appears above all things hateful, till Christ appears most precious and lovely, till your hearts are broken with sorrow for sin, and the love of Christ constrains you to feel and live to him who died for you.

And while you look, lest you should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, remember that he who is here set before you crucified as the Lamb of God, is now at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high; and hear him saying, Fear not. I am the first and the last: A word to those who are now about to depart, or as the prophet expresses it in our text, to hide their faces from Christ. You have heard, my friends, of the sufferings of Christ. You now see him set forth crucified before you in the symbols of his body and blood.

And have you no concern in these sufferings? Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Nothing to you, that the Son of God has appeared on earth as a man of sorrows, and suffered and died for the sins of the world? Yes, my friends, it is something, it is much to you. Whether you are interested in the benefits of his death or not, you are in some measure the occasion of it. He was wounded for your transgressions, he was bruised for your iniquities; and if you will now come and believe in him, you shall all by his stripes be healed.

Will you view his sufferings unmoved? Will you persist in despising and rejecting him, and render his sufferings for you of no avail? Will you become accomplices with the betrayers and murderers of Christ, and by continuing to reject him, crucify to yourselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame? O be not so cruel to Christ, so cruel to yourselves. Listen to us, while in the name and as the messenger of

this man of sorrows, we attempt to plead his cause, and persuade you to receive him.

See him for your sakes dragged as a lamb to the slaughter. Hear him praying for his murderers, and for you who neglect him, Father, forgive them. Hear him saying, O sinner, did I suffer all this for thee, and is this the return you make? Do ye thus requite your Lord, your Saviour, O foolish people and unwise? O for your own sakes, for my sake, for the sake of all my sorrows and agonies, I beseech you not to destroy yourselves. My friends, do not your hearts begin to relent! Can you resist the pleadings of this man of sorrows?

Do not your sins begin to appear hateful? Do you not wish that you had confessed him ere this, and that you could now come and weep before him at his table? Do not your hearts begin to say, Lord it is enough. I will reject thee no longer. My hard heart has stood out against thine anger, but it cannot resist thy sorrows and thy love. If it is not too late, if thou canst receive such an ungrateful wretch, take me; for from henceforth I am wholly thine.

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