

Easter (1988) - the Sacrifice of Christ

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the significance of Jesus Christ's sacrificial death as a voluntary, vicarious, and victorious act of love that brings redemption, release, cleansing, forgiveness, and peace with God.

Duration: 28:24

Scripture: Isaiah 53:4

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the 53rd chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah, specifically verses 4-6. The preacher highlights the significance of these verses in understanding the meaning of the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The preacher shares a story of a man from Ethiopia who was reading this passage and was intrigued by the idea of someone suffering for the wrongdoings of others. This man later encounters someone who explains to him that this prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus, who showed his love by giving his life for others. The preacher emphasizes the importance of loving one another as Jesus loved us, as stated in the first epistle of John.

Transcript

Leading up to Good Friday, our evening meditations have been based upon the 53rd chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. And this evening, we consider the section that begins with verse 4, reading through to verse 6. Surely he took our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. These words of Holy Scripture are so familiar to us that we sometimes fail to be moved by them. This evening, let us hear these words afresh through the understanding of those who came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and an appreciation of the meaning of the cross in the pages of the New Testament.

Here's a man who says, I had been to Jerusalem to worship God. I had made the long journey from my native land of Ethiopia. I had become tired of the idols of my people.

I was looking for something more and something better, and I was attracted to the lofty morality of the Hebrew people. I heard them recite the Ten Commandments out of the book of Exodus, and my soul was stirred by the noble standard of conduct that was found there. Turning from idols, I decided to worship the true and living God, and that is why I made the journey all the way northward along the Nile and crossing over into Jerusalem.

And on my way back from worshiping the God of the Jews, I was sitting in my chariot, and as its wheels made their way slowly across the trackless desert, I was reading from the sacred scroll of the Old Testament, reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet. And I came to the 53rd chapter of that book, and I read there about a mysterious character who seemed to suffer not for anything wrong that he had done, but in some way his suffering was connected with the wrongdoings of others. I had no idea as to who this individual might be, and I looked up from the reading of this sacred scroll, and I saw a man coming toward me in the distance, and he joined himself to my chariot, and he began a conversation in a most appropriate way.

Nothing cold, nothing abrupt, nothing remote. He came near and asked me what I was doing. I told him I was reading.

He asked me if I understood what I was reading, and I told him that I was fascinated with the character who seemed to suffer for something that others had done. And I asked him, is this the prophet Isaiah himself, or is he writing about somebody else? And I will never forget how Philip, the evangelist, began with that same scripture and preached unto me about Jesus. I heard about him who was wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquities, and I put my faith in him, and I received Christian baptism.

And now I go back to my post as treasurer to the Queen of Ethiopia, having been immeasurably enriched with the unsearchable riches of the grace of God revealed in him who is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. I realized that what he did, he did willingly, motivated by love for me. His death was voluntary, and his death was in my place.

It was also vicarious. No sooner has the Ethiopian eunuch moved from the scene than his place is taken by another. I'm not like the Ethiopian who came to discover the God of the Jews.

I am a Jew, a Jew of all Jews, from the tribe of Benjamin that gave Israel Saul as its first king. I am one steeped in the scholarship of the Old Testament scriptures. I have great zeal for the Lord God Jehovah, and I'm sick and tired of all these people who come along and say that they are the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

I have seen these deceivers and impostors come across the scene of history, mislead my people into rebellion against the Romans, and call back from the Romans massacre. I had had enough of these false messiahs, of these impostors, and of the latest in this chain of impostors, a Nazarene by the name of Jesus. And if he died, he only got what he deserved.

That was my frame of mind. Yes, according to Isaiah, I did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted because he was an imposter claiming to be the Messiah when I and you know that he was a fraud. And with Jesus gone from the scene, I set about persecuting his followers.

And on one occasion I was armed with credentials from the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem on my way to Damascus to root out this pestilential sect following a deceased imposter named Jesus. And as I made my

way to Damascus, I saw a great light and I encountered the living Lord. And I asked him, who art thou Lord? And I was reduced to total submission.

Lord, what do you want me to do? And I, who had gone to Damascus armed with credentials to uproot the pestilential sect of the followers of the Nazarene, found that I myself had to be led by the hand because I had lost my sight. And through a process that you will have become familiar with by reading the ninth chapter to the book of Acts and what was narrated again in the 22nd chapter and contained in the 26th chapter, you will know by now that I, Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the Church of God, enemy and antagonist of Jesus of Nazareth, in my blindness came to a flash of insight. And I came to realize that the death he died was not for misdeeds that he had done, but that he was wounded for my transgressions.

He was bruised for my iniquities. The chastisement of my peace was on him and with his stripes I have been made whole of the deadly plague of sin. And that is why if you read my letters you will find repeated references to the voluntary and vicarious sacrifice of Jesus.

In my Galatian letter I put it plainly, the life I now live I faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. And in the third chapter of my letter to the Galatians I make it crystal clear that Christ became a curse for us, that he suffered the penalty deserved by our lawlessness, dying in our place on the tree. And that is why if you thumb through my correspondence with the Corinthians you will hear me saying Christ died for our sins, fulfilling the Old Testament scriptures like the 53rd chapter of the Isaiah.

For God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that self-righteous Pharisees like me might attain a right standing with a holy God. And that is why I now go the length and breadth of the earth pleading with people to be reconciled with God now that God has done all that needed doing from his side to be reconciled to us. Saul of Tarsus, Paul the missionary, is followed by another, by another who tells us that he came to be a follower of Jesus after hearing his call to discipleship while mending his nets, for he was a fisherman.

And Jesus gave me the name of Son of Thunder along with my brother James. You see we were ill-tempered, hot-tempered, men with a very short fuse. On one occasion we went through the half-breed district of Samaria and the people didn't treat us with the kind of respect that I thought they should have showed.

And I had the audacity to ask Jesus, say the word and we will call down fire from heaven to consume them all to a crisp. They are wretches and they deserve to die a wretched death. My ill-temper was compounded with unholy ambition, the push for power, for with a bit of encouragement from my mother and together with my brother James we went to Jesus and asked him to give us the inside track when he would set up his cabinet and establish his kingdom.

We thought ourselves to be so much better than the rest. We wanted the preeminence for ourselves. We didn't see that our pride would be destructive of the fellowship of the apostolic band.

Ill-tempered, proud, arrogant, ambitious, self-seeking, that describes me. But then the meaning of his cross began to come home to me. Then I remembered his saying that he was the Good Shepherd and the Good Shepherd would give his life for the sheep.

Then I remembered his saying which you'll find in my gospel, greater love hath no man than this, than that a man laid down his life for his friends. You are my friends. Then I remembered the reproof that he gave

us, saying that we had followed a pagan pattern, pushing for power, grasping at preeminence.

While we should have remembered that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. And it was then that I began to see that what Isaiah had prophesied in the 53rd chapter of his book was literally fulfilled by Jesus who showed his love and gave his life for others. And that is why if you read my first epistle you will hear me, John, the beloved disciple, say plainly that we ought to love one another as he has loved us.

That we should not love in mere words but that we should love indeed as he has loved us. Herein is love not that we first loved God but God loved us and gave his Son to be the sacrifice for our sin, Isaiah 53, fulfilled in the self-giving sacrificial death of Jesus for us. And that is why I now tell you that you ought not to sin.

Sin put Jesus on the cross. And yet if any man sin, I want you to remember that we have an advocate with the Father who pleads our cause, Jesus Christ the righteous, who died in order to be the covering and the full atonement for our sin and not for ours only but for the sins of the world. And if you and I confess our sins, if I confess my pride, my arrogance, my ambition, my hot temper, he is faithful and just to forgive me my sins and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness.

The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. One more remains to be heard. Beyond the Ethiopian treasurer and soul who becomes Paul the Apostle and John the beloved disciple.

And he of course is Peter. It was through Andrew my brother that I was introduced to Jesus. And it was I before all the rest who had the flash of insight to see that he was indeed the true Messiah of Israel, that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus pronounced me blessed for having that insight. But you know there were times in the course of my career where I was badly confused. And instead of waiting for things to become clear, I blurted out utter nonsense and I showed myself counterproductive to what Jesus was trying to get across.

For on one occasion when Jesus said that he would have to suffer, that he would be betrayed, that he would be spat upon, that he would be scourged, that he would be lynched, I said that'll never happen to you. I won't let it happen. On another occasion when Jesus again spoke of his impending death and that we would all forsake him, I boasted that even though everybody else would become coward, I would show courage and I would stay true to the last.

So superior did I imagine myself to be to everybody else. He warned me about that and he told me to be vigilant and to be prayerful, to watch and pray because in an unguarded moment I would be captivated, I would be fascinated, I would be intimidated, and I would be allured into the denial of my Lord. And I thought it might happen to others but never to me.

And when he was betrayed and he was arrested and he was put on trial, I did deny him. And when he as a prisoner was let across the courtyard and our eyes met, I wept and I wondered the terrible sin that I have committed. My ignorance, my confusion, my boasting, my lack of vigilance, my prayerlessness, my yielding to temptation, my denial of the Master.

Will he ever find it in his heart to forgive me? But now that is all resolved. I know better. You see my ancestors had taught that one day a person would appear who would take all of our guilt, all of our sin, and take it upon himself and bear it away into a far country to be remembered against us no more.

I know who that person is and he has dealt with my sin and with yours. And that is why in my first letter I set it forth with great and repeated plain speech. But we have been redeemed from the bondage of guilt because a lamb without blemish and without spot, Jesus has been slain for us on the altar of the cross.

And I tell you that he bear in his own body our sins on the tree. We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted, but he was wounded for our transgressions and he was bruised for our iniquities. And that is why I state it categorically.

Jesus Christ the just died for the unjust that he might bring us back to God. Having heard the Ethiopian eunuch and listened to Paul the Apostle and heard again the words of John and his fellow Apostle Peter, we can see why gospel doctrine, why evangelical theology interprets the death of Jesus Christ as something voluntary, what he did he did willingly out of love. As something vicarious, what he did he did not for himself, he did for us.

And that is what we commemorate tonight. This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for the remission of the sins of many.

A voluntary death, a vicarious death, and a victorious death because in the self-giving of Jesus we learn how to overcome our selfishness, our greed, our pride, our ambition, and we become moved by the Spirit of God to follow in his steps and to love one another as he has not only given us commandment to do, but set forth an example in his self-giving. And so we see that what Isaiah had prophesied, others have experienced redemption, release, cleansing, forgiveness, and peace with God because of who Jesus is and what he has done out of love for us. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, how can we ever thank you enough for what you did in giving yourself as a sacrifice to bear away our sin, deepen our faith in your atoning blood, stir and increase our devotion to you so that believing that you died for us, we will renew our commitment to live for your honor and glory. This we ask for the advancement of your kingdom. Amen.

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