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The Cross Explained; Isaiah 53.4-6
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Introduction – Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of what is often called Holy Week, commemorating the last week of Jesus' life and ministry. Palm Sunday, of course, referring to the palm branches that were laid on the ground as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. This act would be considered much like in our day of rolling out the red carpet. It signified this man is special and is to be regarded as so. The cheering crowd rang out with Hosannas that day. Hosanna meaning "please save us. Jesus was declared to be the King of Israel. No more accurate praise could be given Jesus than to hail Him as Savior and King. It was triumphant. It was celebratory. And it was short-lived.

In less than a week, the cheers would turn to jeers, Hosanna would be replaced with "Crucify Him," and by Friday, known as Good Friday, Jesus would hang on a cruel Roman cross, despised, humiliated, rejected, tortured, and eventually dead.

What are we to make of this tragic ending to the life and ministry of Jesus? The disciples were certainly perplexed and confused and went into hiding for fear of their own lives. Here is a miracle-worker, that is undeniable, who went about doing good and preaching the kingdom of heaven. That is without question as well. He claimed to be God. He claimed to be the way to heaven, the sole access to God the Father. He claimed to have come down from heaven to deliver God's people. And yet, here He is on a cross, executed in public, blood-soaked and dying as a criminal. How is this man to save anyone if He cannot even save Himself? Helpless and finally breathless as He hung His head and died.

If He is who He says He is, and that seems apparent given His remarkable power demonstrated time and time again, what in the world is He doing on a cross? It seems so out of place, and yet this was the very place He was destined for from birth. What appeared to be a failure to save was actually the means to save. What made Jesus appear to be anything but the Savior was indeed the very thing that made Him Savior.

In fact the cross was God's plan to save His people from the beginning and Isaiah writes about it through a prophetic lens some 700 years before Jesus was born. He truly came to die.

- I. The Cross Misunderstood (v4)
 - a. It really should come as no surprise or shock that the cross would be so misunderstood. Isaiah's prophecy stated that it would. Jesus' enemies were certainly confused. They had no idea that their plan to annihilate Jesus would actually accomplish His greatest work. The disciples were distraught, not being able to comprehend how dying on a cross could possibly be deliverance. Even today the cross of Christ is misunderstood. Its nothing more than a tragic death in the history of tragic deaths.
 - b. But God views the cross from a different perspective. It wasn't a victory of Christ's enemies, it was a victory of Christ over every enemy. It wasn't merely a death recorded in history; it was a death that changed history. It wasn't just the death of an innocent man without consequence; it was the death of the Son of Man with eternal consequence. It wasn't the failure of Jesus to accomplish His mission to save God's people; it was in fact Jesus saving His people.
 - c. God, in Christ, was doing something for the people of God. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He carried more than the cross that day. He carried our griefs and our sorrows. To the physical eye, the cross was two beams of wood. To the spiritual eye, the cross was the structure upon which the prince of glory would bear the weight of the sin of the world.
 - d. But it wasn't seen that way. We esteemed Him stricken, defeated. If you don't see the cross through the truth of God's Word and the heart of faith, Jesus looks like a man stricken, beaten within an inch of his life. Wearing a crown of thorns, bearing the flogging stripes, beaten down, bloodied, and dying. Defeated and humiliated – stricken.
 - e. On the cross He is as one smitten of God. Even the OT testifies in Deut 21:23 that a man hanging on a tree is cursed by God. Why this can't be the Savior, can it? Why would He be smitten of God if He is the Savior?

- f. He's stricken. He's smitten. He's afflicted. Added to the brutal, physical pain and suffering of crucifixion was the scorn and mockery of the soldiers and religious leaders. That's how the cross seems to us apart from faith and truth.
 - g. How in the world can this be the King? The Savior? The Deliverer of God's people? 52:14 – His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance. A body so broken and bloodied and hanging in despair resembled more an animal than a man. V7 – like a lamb that is led to slaughter. This looks like defeat. How can this be victory? That's why v5 begins with "But He."
- II. The Cross is Substitutionary Atonement (v5)
- a. We viewed Christ on the cross as stricken, smitten, and afflicted, "But He" was pierced for our transgressions. Now the fog is lifted. Now God's plan comes into view. This wasn't the merely death of man; this was a sacrifice for sin.
 - b. Jesus died for transgressions and iniquities in order to bring peace and complete healing. A transgression occurs when someone breaks the God's law, when someone crosses a moral line God has drawn, when someone ignores the boundaries God set in place. A transgressor is a trespasser, forging headlong into forbidden territory.
 - i. Iniquities are acts of evil and wrongdoing. Defying nature, ignoring conscience, pleasing selfish desires.
 - ii. So the cross is atonement. The debt of sin is being paid. Judgement is being rendered. Punishment is meted out.
 - c. But wait a minute. Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the Father. He was not a transgressor. He committed no iniquities. These are not His sins for which He dies. So to whom do all these sins belong? It's so clear, isn't it? He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities.
 - i. So the cross is substitutionary. Jesus is paying for my sin and your sin and the sins of all the people of God. It's my transgressions upon those holy shoulders. It's my iniquities falling upon His back, bearing down on His head.

- ii. He is there for me. He is my substitute. He takes my place and bears the wrath of God against my sin. He is my atonement. He removes my sin by bearing the judgment of my sin.
 - d. And oh how much did my sin cost the Savior? My dark thoughts, my selfish motivations, my evil deeds, my wicked words. How can I ever be free of the sin that separates me from God and sentences me to an eternity of doom? What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
 - i. He was pierced with thorns and nails and a spear. He was crushed beneath the wrath of God. He was chastised as though He was the wicked one. He was wounded. He was wounded. My Savior was wounded for me.
 - ii. The piercing, crushing, chastising, and wounding were mine. He wasn't just dying; He was dying for me.
 - e. And because Christ on the cross is my substitutionary atonement, instead of facing the piercing, crushing, chastising, and wounding judgment of God upon my sin, through Christ instead of eternal judgement I have Peace – peace with God, peace that the world cannot give, peace that passes all understanding, and peace that will bloom and last for eternity.
 - f. And I have complete healing. He has healed me completely. First, by restoring my soul. And soon by giving me a new, glorified, immortal body that will last forever in His presence with joy unspeakable. He makes you new and then He makes you whole.
 - g. The Cross explained is this: Christ took what we deserved in order to give us what we could never earn. As our only Substitute He is our only Savior.
- III. The Cross is the Only Salvation for Sinners (v6)
 - a. There is no way we can save ourselves. There is not enough good works to outweigh our bad works. Apart from grace, we don't even want God, unless it's the god we want him to be. We have gone astray, every single one of us, has gone our own way instead of God's way. If He doesn't save us, we won't be saved. If He doesn't die for us, we won't have eternal life.

- b. There was only one way because there is only one Lord and one Savior and one means to remove our sin – and so the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all!

Conclusion – the cross that is so misunderstood becomes the place where Jesus is so loved and worshipped and praised. Alas, and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?
At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away. Once the cross is explained, the gore turns to glory, the sorrow and shame to joy, the death to life, when Jesus takes my sin and gives me salvation