

Man of sorrows

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn now to Isaiah chapter 53, and words we find from verse 2. Isaiah 53 and verse 2.

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground. He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

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.

Now the Lord's Supper focuses in a very special way upon the Lord Jesus Christ. In the supper we eat his body, and we drink his blood, and he himself has said to us, this do in remembrance of me.

And within that, we remember even more specially the sufferings of the death of our Saviour. The focus falls upon the broken body of the shed blood.

[1 : 3 7] And that's why this morning, I want to take our starting point from this incomparable chapter, in which, in a preeminent way, we have the sufferings of the Saviour described for us.

And in the course of this description, we find a constant contrast drawn between appearance and reality.

There is, on the one hand, the way that things seemed, and on the other hand, the way that things really were.

And so, how then, did things look?

That great moment particularly, the cross, the death of the Saviour, how did things look?

[2 : 5 9] It looked, first of all, as if he had no form or comeliness, and no beauty that we should desire him. There was nothing in or about Jesus Christ that commanded instant popularity or instant recognition.

He was not, in the modern sense, a charismatic or magnetic personality. There was, we're told here, no form, there was no comeliness, there was no beauty that men and women should desire him.

And that was true from so many different points of view. If you look, for example, at his pedigree, he had been born in a stable, born in a stable, born in a stable, born in a stable, born in a stable, born of poor parents, born of people who were nobody, and brought up and reared in the town of Nazareth, a town which was a proverb for disreputableness.

That was his pedigree. And if you looked at his circumstances, there was nothing in them either to indicate anybody of special merit or a special status.

He was someone who knew only humble circumstances, one who knew suffering and privation and vulnerability and poverty, nothing at all majestic or regal or powerful or affluent in any of his circumstances.

[4 : 51] And again, if you looked at his outward form and appearance, all you saw was a man, all you saw was a human being, the likeness of flesh, the likeness even of sinful flesh, that's all there was.

You saw the form of a servant, the form of a slave. And if you looked at the very end of his life, and if you saw him hanging on the cross, we are told that at the very end, he scarcely looked even human.

We're told in verse 14 of the previous chapter, that his message was marred more than man. It was so disfigured beyond human recognition.

Not only did he not look like God, he didn't even look like man made in the image of God. So awful had been the abuse and the battering and the torturing that he had received.

And so there was nothing. There was nothing in his pedigree or his circumstances or his appearance or his end to indicate that this man was anything special.

[6 : 21] I want to pause for a moment to make one inference from that, and that is this. That if we today can see beauty in Christ, if we think that Christ is great, if we think that the Lord is wonderful, if we desire him, if we want him, if we admire him, if we long for him, if we wish we hadn't for ourselves, then that shows beyond any dubiety that a great change and a great transformation has occurred in our own hearts.

Because to the unregenerate heart and to the taste of a natural man, Jesus Christ is nothing. If to you he is something, if you say, Lord be my God and early seek, my soul and thirst for thee, if more than anything else you want him, then something has happened which has changed all your perspectives and all of your interests.

The devil wants you this morning and mess to the question, what do you think of yourself? What do you think of your own experience? What do you think of your own conversion?

Of your own faith? Of your own love for the brethren? Of your own conviction of sin? What do you think of all these elements in your own experience? The question is not what you think of your own experience, but what do you think of him?

The question is not even do you think you have him? We may be in this position this morning that we may not be sure absolutely that we do have him, but we know that if we did have him, then we would be secure, and all our needs would be made.

[8 : 21] And in that argument there is the germ, the great fact of our trust in and our love for the Lord Jesus. And so if this morning your attitude is the exact opposite of this one, if to you he is not some nurture-starved plant but the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, if he is not some root out of a dry and sterile and sunburned soil, if he is not someone without form or comeliness but the very acme and apex of beauty and loveliness, then God has changed our hearts and God has given us new tastes and new perspectives.

And the second thing was this, it looked as if he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. That's what it looked like.

I don't believe that Jesus was morose or lived his life in a constant despondency or depression. We know that there was a deep, deep joy because he said to do thy will I take delight.

And I'm sure he had great joy in his love for God and in the reciprocating of that love as the Father told him repeatedly, you are my beloved son and I'm well pleased.

God kept on telling him I love you. And that gave him great joy. But it was also true that it looked as if he was a man of sorrows and a man acquainted with grief.

[10 : 23] He was a man who observed sorrow and observed grief. He lived among his fellow men and women and he saw and heard their sighs and their groans and their sorrows.

He lived amid disease and amid privation and poverty. He lived with the outcast and the marginalized.

He was within reach of the leper, within reach of the demon possessed. He was within reach of the publicans and the sinners.

and he was fully aware of the plight and the condition of the human beings with whom he had become one.

But it was more than observation. He was filled with compassion. He was touched with a feeling of our weaknesses.

[11 : 30] he felt for the human beings he saw around him and all the vicissitudes of their own providence and all the pain and anguish of their own lives.

In actual fact, the Bible tells us that what he saw tore him apart. all this sorrow and all this pain and all this oppression and all this injustice he felt it.

It tore him apart as he saw it in others. But it went beyond observing it in others. And it went beyond being torn apart in the depths of his own compassion.

at last he himself experienced grief and experienced sorrow and anguish in the most acute sense.

He suffered loss and disappointment and pain. He knew loneliness and he knew misunderstanding and he knew treachery.

[12 : 48] he knew what it was to have to live on the edge. Even I might say he knew what it was to be the man of whom too much was expected.

The man who in Gethsemane stands before the will of God and the cup that the Father is proffering him and has prepared for him and he says to God I cannot.

He says to God it is too much. He says to God do you really expect me to take this and to go through that?

This human nature trembles and the knowledge of its own infirmity and weakness on the threshold of Calvary is the man who was overwhelmed by the will of God and the man who felt in his humanness that God was asking more than his humanness could bear or his humanness could deliver.

He went to the limit of physical pain he went to the limit of emotional pain he was sore amazed he was very heavy he was overwhelmed he was afraid he was afraid as he looked as the sin bearer at the holiness of God and dread the collision between the sin that he was and the holiness to which that sin had to answer and he trembled in fear how could he endure the wrath and the curse of God are you that somewhere within that long dark tunnel of Golgotha somewhere at the terrible end of the line there will be the moment that eternity long moment of desertion and abandonment by God but it will have no sense of God's love and no sense of meaning and no hope and only a sense of the anger of God directed against what he represented he was the man of sorrows who went beyond all our human sorrow the one who went into the great black hole of Golgotha and that's what it looked like a life lived in sadness a life terminated in grief and in anguish and it's a terrible thing but a life seems at its end to be a failure that cross falsified all his claims made nonsense of all his pretensions that's what the onlookers thought he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief

[16 : 38] I'm not going to pause long to apply it but who is there here this morning who thinks that God is asking too much who is here who trembles before the will of God and he says to God Lord do you expect me to go through that and to endure this to deliver that who is filled with a wine of astonishment who is the defines no comfort no comfort at all of the knowledge of and sometimes there's no comfort at all and sometimes it is the problem the very very problem is that that is God's will and why should it be God's will and why should God want us want me to go through this and we have always to know then that our sorrow never goes beyond tears never outreaches it never outmanches it never never ever even equals it because here is a sorrow at last commensurate with sin and so it looked as if he had no form or comeliness and no beauty that men should desire it looked as if he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and it looked as if he was stricken smitten by God and afflicted it looked as if he had

God for his enemy as if God himself were against him as if he lay so spectacularly under the judgment and under the anathema and under the very curse of God that's what it looked it looked on that cross as if he were on the threshold of a lost eternity and destined for hell indeed as if he were in hell already and what would they have said you see we see this cross through two millennia of pious Christian devotion and reflection and we are so mindless often of its sheer ugliness of its dreadful dreadful irrationality of the darkness and evil and the levelness which the cross represents and these onlookers as they looked what did they see what did they say well they would have said this

I tell you they would have said this man said terrible things this man did terrible things and that's why he's there this man spoke terrible things about our temple this man spoke terrible things about our elders and about our ancients and about our tradition this man spoke terrible things about our people about God's covenant people and he told us that even we the covenant people could go to hell and that we had to be born again imagine imagine saying that about God's own people that those like Nicodemus born in the covenant that they had to be born again what an insult to our people but above all this man said a terrible thing about God a terrible terrible dreadful thing and they would hardly mention it this man said that

God was his father this man made himself equal with God this man said he was as eternal as God was eternal and as powerful and as omniscient as God was powerful and omniscient he said things like that he said terrible things about God made terrible claims about God that God was his own father God ah but God didn't let him off God didn't let him off with it they said and there he is now as they watched him there on the cross they said he said those terrible things and did those terrible things but God didn't let him off with it and now he's suffering suffering for what he said and how he is suffering he is pierced with a crown of thorns he is beaten with the rods he is flogged mercilessly with the

Roman whip and there he is now immolated nailed to the cross of Calvary dying the slow painful excruciating tormented death and they hear they hear the great cacophony of derision as those who pass by and by them as the world that he is saving mocks his love and derides the death that's buying its redemption the blood that secures its salvation he dies not to the melodies of joy and health not to the music or the thankfulness of the redeemed but to this terrible cacophony of derision creation and all the darkness darkness over the whole earth this great suppression of the light symbolic of the darkness in the savior's soul almost and I hope this is not too fanciful as if the demands of dying had reduced the energy of the eternal light and he wasn't able to maintain the accustomed levels of light the

[23 : 58] Christian friend I knew some years ago said in the course of his terminal illness he said how glad he was he had left left to the end to make his peace with God and to secure his whole salvation because he said dying is a full time job and it was that for Christ this dying this dying this very special self giving of Jesus it required such concentration and such tremendous application of effort it was a death and a very curious way to which the son of God had poured all his colossal energy the energy that still the tempest and rebuked the winds and the waves he had to make a super human effort to die to die in the love and obedience of

God an effort of will to resist all those pleas of darkness that said come down from the cross and then they hear him cry it's a cry almost of delirium they think so Elijah Elijah that's what they hear Elijah Elijah is crying for Elijah so confused and so delirious because God is now punishing for all those things he said and for all those things he did and all these things he caused and so he's crying in desperation for Elijah poor man but it wasn't Elijah but and oh I the one time on record when Jesus Christ did not call God Abba in this dreadful moment there is no sense of

God's fatherly love and care at this moment there is no Abba there is only God God in his dreadful majesty God in his holiness Christ bearing the sin of the world Christ made the sin of the world and the presence of the most holy God abandoned it's a maritalist thing you know and I just see in the distance my God how how could a man say my God how could he say this God who's for me this God who's mine at such a point in human experience amid such darkness amid such excruciating pain how did he manage to say even though he couldn't say

Abba how was he able to say my God and he was saying to Abba to my God my God I have never needed you so much I have never been in such distress never been in such pain no man has ever been at such extremity at the very edge of human endurance and human capacity and sustainability my God I need you as I never needed you before and don't leave me now not now not now when it is unendurable when the darkness is so intense when the noise is so awful when the sin is crushing me I need you and he says

I cry but I have not answered and there is a tremendous pathos in it is there anyone there my God are you there are you there to sustain and to touch I remember at the baptism you told me that you loved me and you were well pleased and on the mouth of transfiguration you told me you loved me and you were well pleased can you not tell me again now that you love me and that you are well pleased because I did it even more now even more now and he cries there is no answer there is no word of comfort there is no utterance of love there is none of the touch of

[29 : 21] God's peace none of a sense of God's joy no felt presence no felt infusion of divine energy and comfort is forsaken I don't understand it all we ourselves whatever we have in this life we're never alone we're always covered by the intercession of Jesus and always protected by the great sacrifice of propitiation we're always covered by Christ but there was no cover for Christ there was no mediator for him there was no propitiation that could protect him from the anger of

God he was himself the propitiation he was a powerless thing the son of God in his human nature charged with the sin of the world all all that was poured out in the most undiluted and concentrated form at this point in time at this moment at this point in space in the frail broken human body and the tortured almost delirious mind of the son of

God it was all there in that moment and at that point and there was none to help he wasn't upheld by a sense of God's love or the assurance of God's approval he had no comfort and no comfort it was damnation and he took it lovingly and so that's how it looked there was no beauty to make him desirable or attractive he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief he was streaking smitten by God and afflicted God was against him and God had taken revenge and so but was that reality and we'll see how it is in verse 4 surely he hath bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. 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. The appearance was that God was opposed to him personally and all this was happening to him for his own sin. But the truth was, it was for us.

Of course it's true too that we have here God's action, God sacrificing his own son, pleased the Lord to bruise him. It was the truth that he there was a great high priesthood on the part of God the Father. God his son not sparing gave him to die. I scarce can take it in that on that cross my burden gladly bearing he bled and died to take away my sin. God's action. God was bruising him.

And I might say that yes, it was the very anathema of God that lay upon him. But it did not lie upon him because of his own sin or for his own sin. This great word for it was for us. It was for me. Because he was united to us.

[34 : 16] Because he was acting for us. Because in my place condemned he stood. It looked as if he was a terrible man.

A terrible man who had at last found his nemesis and suffered all that a sin deserved. But of course the truth was, he was the sinless son of God, suffering in the room instead of terrible, terrible, terrible people like you and me.

In my place condemned he stood. And it seems to me then that as we come to this point, we suddenly begin to see light dawning behind the cross.

The cross is a place where first of all we see human depravity at its worst and demonic action at its most malevolent.

Hell at its most furious and meaninglessness and chaos and anarchy at their most apparent. Really we're never going to understand this cross until we desanitize it and see it as the ugliest, ugliest, most horrendous, most hellish, most demonic, diabolical thing that ever happened.

[36 : 02] The darkest moment in human history where God's own son is sacrificed by God for the sin of the world.

And God's son is abandoned by his father for the sin of the world. And if that makes sense to you, if it makes instinctive sense, if you have no problem with that, then you will never understand this cross because it is a terrible, terrible, terrible problem.

Why did God abandon his own son? Why did God put him to grief? That is the darkness. It is in itself the greatest argument I know against the existence of God.

It is the moment of greater spiritual anarchy in the history of this whole universe. Sitting down, they watched him there. They saw the light dead.

They saw the light darkness. They saw the eternal world silenced. But then once we grasp the far, he loved me, gave himself for me.

[37 : 23] Once we grasp the far, a light begins to shine behind the cross. The light of the patience of Christ brought us a lamb to the slaughter.

And as I see before us shearers is done, so he opened not his mouth. I believe that only gradually did Christ begin to realize just how awful the end was going to be.

And in Gethsemane, it becomes particularly clear and horrendous. But I don't believe that even in Gethsemane did Christ fully understand just how awful those hours on the cross would turn out to be.

And yet all the time as he takes it, and it is a taking, as he takes it, there is such weakness and there is such patience.

As he goes towards the darkness and towards the chaos for the sake of his own people. And there is also, I think, the light of the tremendous efficacy of the cross.

[38 : 52] By his knowledge shall my right to serve and justify many. Out of this chaos comes our life and our salvation.

And there is just beginning to dawn too behind the cross. The light of the victory of the Son of God. My servant shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.

But above all, there is the light of the love of God. The love of God the Father. And the love of God the Son.

We are very inclined to forget the Father and his love. And yet so often that's what the New Testament emphasizes.

In a very special way this morning, I want to ask you to give a very conscious thanks to God the Father. Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son.

[40 : 09] And that should be the sentiment of every one of us here at this moment. Thank you, thank you for giving us your Son.

God did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all. God did not spare his own Son. There is the light of the love of Christ.

That love which has her name's engraved on the palms of his hands. that love which shrunk from no cost which went so powerfully and dramatically challenging in seminary and shown with all full clarity what love was going to mean still stood up and said I'll go through with it I'll go through with it someday God may ask us something roughly similar but never anything equal to it having loved his own who are in the world he loved them to the very limit and he loved them to the very end and so as we approach the Lord's table we are indeed conscious of how the cross looked how the appearance was so threatening and I may be close at this particular moment with this the cross looked like the end it looked like the last act the last scene in the life of Jesus Christ anybody thought that was the end there may be times in your own providences as well when you think well this is the end and it's very important to remember this that very often the moment before the last looks like the moment that is the last the cross looked like the last moment it was in fact only the moment before the last the last moment was the resurrection and it's part of the skill sometimes in handing our own lives to know that very often the penultimate moment masquerades as the ultimate one and the world before the last looks like the world which is the last in the life of Christ it all seemed over when they sealed the tomb and evil had won its victory there came of course that other great moment when God emptied the tomb and that was the last worry the great thing here is love will always have a last word because love is the most powerful thing in the world hatred can pretend and hatred can masquerade and bluff but nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord let us pray

O Lord we ask that thou wouldst bless thy word to us and give us grace to respond in love to the glory of thy truth and to the wonder of our saviour's sacrifice on our behalf look down upon us we pray feed our souls on the body and the blood of thy son our saviour and give us every grace we need Lord to remember him with thanksgiving for thy glory's sake Amen you you