

# Explaining Calvary

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Preacher: Prof E.Donnelly

[ 0 : 00 ] For our subject this evening, I would like to speak to you on explaining Calvary. To take us our text, Isaiah chapter 53, verses 4 to 6.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The cross of Jesus Christ does need to be explained.

[ 1 : 12 ] We have made ourselves too familiar with it. We have domesticated it and tamed it and covered it in tinsel.

But it is horrible. It is shocking. It is very ugly. And cruel.

And it is a very strange thing that our religion has at the very centre of our faith.

Something so appalling. And that we among all the religions of the world celebrate the son of our God dying on a piece of wood.

Why would people want to do this? What is there in the cross which makes it so vital?

[ 2 : 17 ] What does it mean? The prophet explains in this passage. John you remember tells us that Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

And we read earlier in our service this greatest of all the suffering servants songs. It's in five sections or paragraphs.

And this verses 4 to 6 is the central section. The third. The heart of the servant song. The heart of the gospel.

The heart of our faith. The heart of the gospel. And here especially surely we feel that we are on holy ground. And it is a mystery isn't it?

That's what Isaiah has been setting out. The one who is high and lifted up and exalted and who acts wisely.

[ 3 : 26 ] And yet at the same time is marred beyond human semblance. So that people look at him and shudder in horror.

How can that be? How can the man of sorrows be the Messiah? Why exalted and suffering?

And so we have in the first three verses of Isaiah 53 general disbelief. People can't take him seriously.

Who has believed what they have heard from us? Very few. No form or majesty. No beauty. That we should desire him. What sort of a God is this?

Despised. Rejected. A man of sorrows. As one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised.

[ 4 : 29 ] And we esteemed him not. What's going on here? What's this about? Isaiah tells us. There is no clearer statement anywhere in scripture.

And of all that we need to know there is nothing more important than this. He tells us two very simple truths. As he sets himself to explain Calvary.

And the first is our sin. Our sin. At this point the focus of the whole passage changes.

Up to now it has been on God's servant. Telling us about him. Who he was. And what he has done. And what he has suffered.

And human beings have come into the previous part of the passage. Just in terms of our reaction. What we thought of him. How we despised him. How we rejected him.

[ 5 : 32 ] But he is at the center. Now suddenly the focus changes. From the third person to the first person. From he to we.

We. So we find in these verses. Our. Our. We. Our. Our. Us. We.

All we. We. Every one of us. Us all. Eleven references in three verses. To us. Who are we?

Who are we? As these people who criticize God's servant. Who do not esteem God's servant. Who despise God's servant. Previously in the passage.

Humans. Have been judging. The son of God. And they have found him wanting. But now God turns the tables. And God tells us.

[ 6 : 29 ] Who we are. And don't we find the same today still. People are so ready aren't they. To pass judgments. On God.

And find fault with God. Why does God allow war? I can't believe in a God. Who would send anyone to hell.

I will never forgive God. For what he allowed to happen to me. They are judging God. And criticizing. And condemning God.

But here the tables are turned. And the question is asked. Who are these people? Who are these critics? What are they like? Are they competent.

To judge God. Who are you oh man. To answer. Back to God. God. And as we look at the passage. The mystery.

[ 7 : 28 ] Begins to simplify. The prophet begins. With an obvious fact. Our griefs. And our sorrows.

Our lives. Are marked. By sickness. And suffering. By pain. And disappointment. By tears.

And death. He's not yet dealing with sin. As such. But with the sad. Results of sin. The hurts.

And injuries. And griefs. We experience. You remember. How in Matthew 8. The gospel. Interprets this passage. Verse 16.

Of that chapter. Jesus cast out the spirits. And healed. All. Who were sick. This was to fulfill. What was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

[ 8 : 28 ] He took our illnesses. And bore our diseases. No one. On this earth. Is free of these things. Our griefs.

Our sorrows. But then the prophet goes deeper. Our transgressions. And our iniquities. This is worse.

The word translated transgression. Means willful. Deliberate. Rebellion. The picture is of a father.

Putting his arms around an angry son. To reassure him. And restrain him. And the son breaks through. His father's arms. He pushes them aside.

He violently loses himself. From his father's care. And control. That's the picture here. A transgression. Is a deliberate. Conscious.

[ 9 : 27 ] Breaking. Of God's law. Knowing that something is wrong. And deciding to do it. In any case. Our transgressions. Aggressions.

And then our iniquities. This refers to what is twisted. And crooked. Dark. And devious. Something inside human beings. Which is distorted. And ugly. And unclean. It's a grim picture. Our lives are not only marked.

By weakness. And sorrow. But there is something radically wrong with us. God says. There is a rottenness. At the core of our being. And it comes out.

In these transgressions. These. Acts of disobedience. To the almighty. He goes on to amplify it. He says. By implication.

[ 10 : 24 ] That we are people who have no peace. Upon him was the chastisement. That brought us peace. Because we didn't have it before. We weren't at peace with ourselves.

We weren't at peace. With each other. Most of all. We were in a state of enmity. Towards the God. Who made us. And to whom we were accountable.

The barrier between us. An alienation. And in ourselves. We need healed. By his stripes.

We are healed. Because we need it. We are sick. We are abnormal. We are not what we are made to be. We are not what we are meant to be. We are not functioning. Properly.

The reason. Is that there is something wrong with us. It is our universal. And individual. Self. Centredness. As a race.

[ 11 : 24 ] All we. Like sheep. Have gone astray. Without exception. Astray. From the paths of.

Life. And truth. And blessing. And every one of us. Has endorsed. In our own choices. And decisions. The wandering of our race.

Each one of us. Every one of us. Has turned. To. His own way. This. Is. Who we are. These are the people.

Who presume. To dismiss. God's servant. As not worthy. Of their attention. Sinners. Not just people.

Who have made a few mistakes. Who need to improve. That we are described. As selfish. Twisted. Rebels.

[ 12 : 19 ] Desperately. Horribly. Sick. Whose wrongdoing. Has brought sorrow. Into our lives. And separated us. From God. And this is his own analysis.

Of who. Human beings. Are. Nothing. Could be more politically. Incorrect. Or unacceptable. To our world.

Which is soaked. Still. In the propaganda. Astonishingly. After one of the most wicked. Centuries. In human history. The propaganda.

That human beings. Are basically good. Good. No. No. Says the prophet. Transgressors. Rebels. Against God.

And you see. It's only. With this diagnosis. That the cross. Has any meaning. If human beings. Are basically good.

[ 13 : 17 ] The cross. Is pointless. If human beings. Are healthy. If man. Is competent. If man. Is able. To. Govern. His own life.

And destiny. And then. Sitting. In comfortable. Self. Sufficiency. Looking at. Calvary. There is no answer. There is no answer.

It's like. Going into. A doctor's surgery. Unless. You accept. The presupposition. Of illness. There's no point.

In a doctor's surgery. There's no rational. Explanation. For all these people. Sitting in this room. What are they doing there? Well. They're sick. Once you understand that.

It makes sense. We cannot. Understand. Christ. We cannot. Understand. Calvary. Until. We see.

[ 14 : 15 ] Our sin. Those who are well. Have no need. Of a physician. Or a savior. But those.

Who are sick. My friends. Do you realize. Have you been brought. To realize. Who you are. By nature. Before.

Before. Almighty God. Isn't this picture. True. Of you and me. Don't we know. Grief. And sorrow.

Haven't you and I. Transgressed. How many times. In your life. Have you set yourself. To do something. That you knew was wrong.

That you knew you shouldn't do. But you did it. You did it. You did it. So did I. Haven't you entertained thoughts.

[ 15 : 18 ] That you would be ashamed. That you would be ashamed. For any other human being. To know. Aren't some of your motives.

And mine. So self-serving. As not to bear the light of day. Haven't we desires in us at times.

That are simply foul. Can we deny. Our intense. Self-centeredness.

Every one of us. Wanting above all. Our own way. If you're not a converted person. Do you not know.

In the depths of your heart. That you're not at peace. With God. You're not near him. You're not ready to meet him. Face to face.

[ 16 : 18 ] Isn't God's diagnosis. Completely accurate. About every one of us. When God sets himself. You see. To explain Calvary.

He explains. He explains. What our sin is. And this alone. Begins to make. Things clear. And without this.

We can't understand it. Our sin. But thank God. This is not the complete. Explanation.

For we see here. Secondly. Our substitute. Our substitute. In a way. I'm reluctant. To say that.

Human beings. Are indispensable. We all like to think. We are indispensable. We like to imagine. In our vanity. That the world.

[ 17 : 15 ] Or our church. Or our family. Can hardly go on. Without us. And of course. It's an illusion. In our salvation. In our salvation. In our salvation. But friends. There's a sense. In which.

We are. Indispensable. A sense. In which. We play a part. Which no one else.

In all creation. Is able to pray. A sense. In which. We can provide. An answer. Which no one else. Can give. Faith.

I'm thinking of that. Awful. Cry. Of. Dereliction. On the cross. Where the son. In utter. Anguish. Cried.

My God. My God. Why. Have you forsaken me. Why. Who's going to answer that.

[ 18 : 13 ] Dreadful. Inquiry. The angels. Can't. They desire to look into these things.

The devils can't. And the question echoes. Through the universe. God's righteous.

Holy. Perfect. Well beloved son. Cries out. Why. Why. Who can answer that.

The universe waits. And then a group of people. Step forward. To center stage. The we. Of the passage. God's elect. God's own. God's own. And then to the terrible. Silence. Of that.

[ 19 : 22 ] Echoing. Why. We speak. We know why. We know the answer. We are. We are the answer. He was wounded. For our transgressions. He was crushed. For our iniquities. With his stripes. We are healed. We. Most sinners. Most sinners. We. The equation doesn't add up. A vital factor is missing. We see here the sufferings of the servant.

He was wounded. Literally, he was pierced. It's used of a death thrust, stabbing through the flesh to take away life. He was crushed.

[ 20 : 28 ] The way it's expressed in the original suggests complete destruction. Broken in pieces, shattered, trampled to death. His back was torn open by the stripes.

Here is suffering unparalleled. As all the words of agony pile on each other. And then darkest of it all, most mysterious and terrible.

And yet there's a dawning hope. We're told that this is not an accident. This is not an irrational freak. This is not the action of evil men or spirits.

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The God who is love and perfect goodness. He inflicted this. He inflicted this. He inflicted this. On the son in whom his soul delighted.

[ 21 : 35 ] And that verb opens up the meaning for us. Laid upon him. Language familiar to every Old Testament worshiper.

Basic to sacrifice. The laying hands on the head of the victim. The lamb. The lamb. Transferring our sins. To the animal dying in its place.

The lamb. The scapegoat. The priest laid his hands. We read in Leviticus 16. He shall put their sins on the head of the goat.

The goat shall bear all their iniquities. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. God himself placing on his son all the sins of all his people.

The lamb of God. Who takes away the sin of the world. The appointed sacrifice. That's why he was forsaken.

[ 22 : 44 ] That's why he was despised. Humiliated. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. God hates sin.

And is determined to punish sin. And we are under condemnation. But the good news of the gospel. Is that Christ has died in place of sinners.

He had no sin of his own. He had no penalty to pay. No sentence could be pronounced against him. But he was wounded. He suffered what we should have suffered.

He died. And we should have died. He became a curse. When that was the sentence that you and I deserved.

Here is the heart and center of salvation. Here is the mystery of all the ages. When man was lost and ruined.

[ 23 : 50 ] God gave his only son. He provided himself a lamb. The son lived and died for his people. The great exchange.

As Luther called it. At Calvary. At Calvary. All our sin was taken. And placed on him. And the whole fury of the righteous anger of God.

Was poured out on him. He paid the penalty. To the fool. What. Did it cost him? Some of you may have read.

George Orwell's dark novel. 1984. Towards the end of the novel. The authorities are trying to break the hero.

To turn him into someone. Subhuman. He's one good thing in his life. His love for a woman called Julia. Julia. And he's decided that he will never betray her.

[ 24 : 53 ] He will never forsake her. And eventually they threaten him. With a torture. So fearful. So awful. So unbearable.

That looking at it. He turns. To his torturers. And he says. Don't do it to me. Do it to Julia. Do it to Julia.

And they've broken him. They've broken him. And our blessed Lord. Looked at the horror. Of all horrors. Forsaken. Abandoned. He said to his father. The reverse. Don't do it to them.

Do it to me. Do it to me. Upon him. Upon him. Is the chastisement. That brought us peace.

[ 25 : 59 ] And with his stripes. We are healed. How gracious. That God.

Should look on us. In our wretchedness. And choose to love us. Enough. To send to the death.

His beloved son. In our place. For the Lord. For the Lord. Jesus. Has done. Everything. Everything. For you. It is finished. We didn't deserve it.

We didn't ask for it. We didn't even want it. We could never have obtained it. And he gives it to us. Freely. How profound.

Mystery of mysteries. Wonder of wonder. Our minds. Will never exhaust it. To all eternity. One of the greatest intellects.

[ 26 : 58 ] After studying it at length. Was moved to cry. Oh the depth. Of the riches and wisdom. And knowledge. Of God. And how.

Blessedly. Simple. That it can be grasped. In essence. By the youngest. By the dullest.

Perhaps even more readily. For it's revealed unto babes. The son of God. Loved me. And gave himself. For me.

Are any of you here tonight. Still. In your sins. Still outside of Christ. Still carrying.

That intolerable weight of guilt. God's anger against you. My friend. Do you not see. Your lostness. And your danger. And how Christ.

[ 27 : 59 ] Can save you. Will you not come to him. And cry to him. For mercy. And say. He was wounded. For my transgressions.

And with his stripes. I am healed. Here then. Is the explanation. Of Calvary. And it explains it.

Simply. And perfectly. Jesus Christ. In the place. Of sinners. sinners. But how should we respond.

Let me suggest. Three ways. Repentance. Repentance. In Shakespeare's.

Julius Caesar. Mark Antony. Faces a crowd. Who have been made. Hostile. Against the dead. Caesar. And he doesn't know.

[ 28 : 59 ] How to turn them around. But eventually. He brings. Caesar's. Bloody robe. And. Mutilated body. And he says. A few of tears. Prepare to shed them now.

I'm not eloquently said. But I can show you. Sweet. Caesar's wounds. Poor. Dumb. Mouths. And bid them. Speak.

For me. And when the crowd. Sees. Their wounded hero. Their hearts are moved. And they come back. To their own loyalty. My dear friends.

In. In ordinary human life. We feel sorrow. When we do harm. When we cause damage. When we hurt people. We feel sorry for it. And we're reminded here. Of the dreadful. Dreadful wounds. Physical.

[ 30 : 02 ] Emotional. Above all spiritual. Inflicted. On our Lord Jesus. And we. Are.

Responsible. Our. Transgressions. Our. Iniquities. Our. Sins.

Drove. Down. The thorns. Your. Sins. And mine. Tore. Open. His. Back. Cried. Crucify. Him. Crucify. Him. The old. Negro. Spiritual. Asked. Were you there. When they. Crucified. My Lord.

Oh yes. We were there. All right. And it should lead us.

[ 31 : 00 ] Should it not. To hate. To hate. Our sin. What about your present sins. What about your sins of this day.

Are you complacent about them. Have you grown familiar with them. Have you turned them into household pets. Are you treating your sins lightly.

Are you saying well that's the way I am. Are you taking God's forgiveness. For granted. Are you treating the blood. As an unholy thing.

The prophet says. When they look on me. On him. Whom they have pierced. They shall mourn.

And surely as we prepare. To go to the Lord's table. We should be saying. Lord. Help me. Help me. To hate.

[ 32 : 03 ] My sin. Which did that to my Savior. Repentance. And faith.

Faith. You remember Thomas. And Thomas wasn't sure. And Thomas was. Doubting. What was it that brought Thomas back.

Put your finger here. And see my hands. Put out your hand. And place it on my side. Do not disbelieve. But believe.

And you may sometimes ask yourself. Am I truly forgiven? Does God forgive me? Are my sins covered over?

That's a haunting fear. And some of the best. Of God's people. Are troubled by it. From time to time.

[ 33 : 08 ] But we read here. That he was wounded. And he was crushed. Of that there is no doubt. And it was not for his own sins.

For he had none. Of that there is no doubt. So it must have been. For the sins. Of others.

God's forgiveness. You see. Is not just a concept. Or a theory. It's not just a vague. Mystical idea. It is based. On actual.

Physical. Wounds. On blood. That you could have analyzed. On flesh. That was actually torn. On real.

Iron nails. The penalty. Has. Been. Paid. The penalty. Has. Been. Paid. Isn't that so?

[ 34 : 07 ] We can never doubt it. Payment. God. Will not. Twice. Demand. First. At my bleeding. Surety's hand. And then again.

At mine. Jesus comes to us. And says. Look at my hands. Do not disbelieve.

Repentance. And faith. And lastly. Love. There's an Irish folk song.

That some of you may have heard. A man is singing it to his old mother. She's an old done woman. But to him. She's beautiful. Sure I love the dear silver.

That shines in your hair. And your brow that's all furrowed. And wrinkled with care. And I kiss. Those dear fingers. So toil worn.

[ 35 : 10 ] For me. God bless you. And keep you. Mother. Mokri. What would you think of a man. Who laughed at his old mother.

Who pointed at her. And said. Look at her. Look at her wrinkles. Look at her grey hair. Ugly old woman. What sort of a son would that be? The marks of her suffering.

Are the evidence. Of a lifetime. Of love. And care. He sees in the marks. Of his mother's aging.

All her love. For him. And my friends. Our Lord Jesus. Is despised. And rejected. By men. Because he was weak.

And because he was lowly. And because he was cursed. And because he hung on a tree. And we esteemed him. Stricken. Smitten by God.

[ 36 : 12 ] And afflicted. But cries Isaiah. Don't you see? Don't you understand? The cruel. Bitter. Unfairness of it. It was for our transgressions. That he was wounded.

It was love for us. That brought him low. We love.

I trust the Lord now. Peter says. Though you have not seen him. You love him. If you're a Christian.

You love your Lord. At this moment. As he is in glory. Don't you? You love him. And we shall love him. When he comes again. Paul speaks of all.

Who have loved. His appearing. And we shall love him. As we live in his presence. Forever. But.

[ 37 : 15 ] I don't say this dogmatically. Think about it. Is it wrong. To say that we love him. Most. Most.

As the pierced. Crushed. Wounded one. When he was leaving a memorial to his people. He said.

Whenever you remember me. This. Is the way. I want you. To remember me. And he broke the body. I broke the bread.

And poured the wine. When you remember me. Remember me. Like this. And there is a sense. In which.

That memory. Will never leave us. You remember the paraphrase of Samuel. The lamb. The lamb.

[ 38 : 13 ] Is all the glory. In Emmanuel's land. We long. Between the throne.

And the four living creatures. And among the elders. I saw a lamb. Standing. As though it had been slain.

Tonight we say. Worthy. Is the lamb. Is the lamb. Who was slain. To receive power. And wealth. And wisdom. And might.

And honor. And glory. And blessing. The son of God. Who loved me.

And gave himself. For me. Lord. You know. You know. You know. You know. You know.

[ 39 : 19 ] But I love you. Amen. Let us pray.

Amen. Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. O Lord God Almighty.

May these glorious truths. Never become trite or common to us. May we never lose the wonder. And the amazement.



Help us to reflect. On the son of God who loved us. And gave himself for us. And all that he suffered for us. Help us to turn from sin.

Help us. O Lord we pray. To know of a certainty. That the blood of Jesus God's son. Cleanses us from all sin. And help us we pray.

[ 40 : 25 ] With all our hearts. To love. Him who first. Loved us. Father. Father. Father. Drive by your spirit. All coldness.

From our hearts. Help us again. To fall in love. With our sweet Lord Jesus. To thank him from our hearts. To worship him in our homes this night.

To tell him afresh. That we love him. You know all things Lord. You know our inconsistencies. And wanderings. And our coldness.

You know our many sins. And our failures. But Father. As you look to the bottom of our hearts. We trust that by your grace. You see there.

That we do love you. Grant. Gracious God. That we may love our Savior. More and more. We ask it for his sake.

[ 41 : 22 ] Amen.