

LENT ACCORDING TO ISAIAH
Isaiah Sees Christ's Innocent Death
Isaiah 53:7-8

TEXT: *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Did you know that if a sheep happens to roll over on its back, it cannot right itself? Some say that if and when that happens, a sheep on its back usually will not struggle to right itself, gives up, and can die in a few hours.

I've mentioned before that my grandfather raised a small flock of sheep. When it was time for the sheep shearers to come over to shear their wool they would reach over the sheep's back, grab a front leg and back leg and flip them on their backs. There they would lay without any struggle while the men sheared off their wool. Then they would have to flip them back on their feet. They couldn't do it by themselves.

So Isaiah continues the sheep metaphor in regard to Christ. Like an innocent sheep, the Christ quietly goes to his death. He does not defend his innocence but willingly lays down his life for God's sheep.

Isaiah is still speaking in the past tense about the future Christ because when the Lord makes a promise, it is as good as done. Speaking about Jesus' innocent suffering and death, Isaiah points out that the Christ does not defend his innocence. He writes: ***He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*** Twice Isaiah says that Jesus will not open his mouth in his own defense. In the mind of his enemies who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ of God, Jesus is silent because he has no defense. The Jews demanded and answer to the question and the used Jesus' answer as proof that he is a liar and a blasphemer that deserves to die. Caiaphas, the high priest demanded: ***I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.*** Jesus replied: ***Yes, it is as you say ...*** Mt 26 Then the Bible says: ***Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.*** Mt 26 In their mind Jesus was indeed guilty! And he had no defense. No wonder he was quiet as they led him like a sheep to the slaughter!

You and I would protest. If we were innocent, we would get a lawyer and defend ourselves. We would demand a fair trial. The only way we would go quietly to the gallows is if we were indeed guilty of sin and resigned ourselves in brave fashion to the consequences of our sin. But Jesus is innocent. Even Pontius Pilate protested when the Jews brought Jesus before him. Pilate said: ***I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him.*** Lu 23 Over and over again, Pilate declared Jesus' innocence, and yet the Jews remained determined to crucify Jesus. That's because Jesus was innocent. And here is the irony: Jesus who is innocent of any and all sin willingly and silently accepts God's Judgment while we who are sinful by nature would protest.

Last Wednesday night we were stunned to hear that our former teacher and principal and personal friend, John Henderson, died without any warning. John was only in his mid-forties. He had not even reached what I consider to be the most productive years of a man's life. He was "cut off from the land of the living." John has descendants, however. His wife, Ronda, and their children, Kaitlyn, Jenna and Nathan will truly miss their husband and father. When these things happen, it's natural for us to ask "why?"

When Job asked "why? Why did my children have to die young and all on the same day?" When Job questioned God, the Bible says that God answered: ***Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.*** Job 38 In today's jargon we could say that God told Job "that's for me to know and for you to find out." When the great apostle Paul prayed and prayed and prayed that the Lord would remove a painful "***thorn in his flesh,***" God's answer was: ***My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*** 2 Co 12 That's for me to know and for you to find out... My grace is all you need.

Yet it is not the unbelieving Jews who lead the Christ to his death, it is God himself. Isaiah says: ***By***

oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yes, the Jews tie him up and lead him to Pontius Pilate who finally pronounces judgment by handing Jesus over to the Jews for crucifixion, but it is God the Father who gives him over. It is God who declares Jesus to be man's sin so that in reality Jesus must suffer and die. Knowing this, our Lord Jesus willingly endures the oppression and judgment of ungodly men, and even the oppression and judgment of God. Jesus is taken away instead of us! ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** Jn 2 Does Jesus protest? No. He willingly goes along with God's plan.

Isaiah reveals this to the ancient Christians 850 years before Christ's innocent suffering and death. What must be learned and believed is that the Christ suffers death for the sake of God's people.

He suffers death for the sake of God's people. ***By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living...*** There will no children born of the Christ. No descendants. He will be "cut off from the land of the living" in the prime of life, but before he would ever have a chance to take a wife and bring children into this world. This is a poetic way of saying that he would be crushed and pierced and would die young.

But when Jesus, the Christ, cried out in agony "WHY??" ***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*** God did not even answer him. But Jesus knew why: Isaiah tells us: ***he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.*** Jesus suffered this death for the sin of God's people. In the prime of life he was given the strength to suffer the blows and the scourging, the carrying of his cross and the pain of crucifixion, all for the sins of the world. Having been made to be the sin of the world punished Jesus so that the world will see the grace and love of God for a fallen mankind!

I mentioned Job who lost all his children on a single day. Throughout the long discourses between Job and his so-called "friends" who kept pontificating on how Job must have done something to upset God to deserve his personal losses, and that he should come clean with God and confess his sin, it is Job who holds to the one fact that God has revealed and that stands out from everything else in the entire universe. Even when God effectively said: Who are you to question my ways?? This single truth that Job held firmly in his heart is what God would have us all know and believe: ***I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and not another.*** Job 19 That is all that we need to know, and it explains everything to those who trust God's Word, for because God forsook Jesus for our salvation has promised never to forsake us. It is written in both the Old and New Testaments: ***Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*** He 13 It is written!

A sheep on his back cannot right himself. They say that within a few hours, without help, he will die. But one good thing about being flat on your back is this: you are looking up! And God's sheep, like Isaiah who saw Christ's innocence that produced our redemption, like Job who knew and believe that our Redeemer lives, like our former teacher, John Henderson who confessed this faith along with his wife and children among us, we will never fear even when on our backs facing death. For God is our Redeemer who has laid down his life for the sheep. Amen