

The Suffering Servant – Part 2
Isaiah 53:2-4

Have you ever been rebuked by Jesus? Jesus, although he was loving and gracious, he also rebuked his beloved disciples. If you remember, In Luke 24, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus rebukes the 2 disheartened disciples because they had failed to see that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer,

“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer ...?” (Luke 24: 25,26)

But even before that incident, Jesus rebukes Peter as he too also fails to see that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer, and die, and be raised to life.

Jesus explained ... he must go to Jerusalem and suffer ... and ... be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter ... began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (Matt 16. 21-23)

Just like Peter and the 2 disciples,
before I became a Christian,
I too had failed to see that the Lord had to suffer.

When I was a young kid,
every Good Friday or Easter,
they would show Jesus movies on TV.
The first half of the movie was always enjoyable:
the miracles Jesus performed were amazing;
the parables and sermons He told were profound and spiritual;
His ability to outwit His enemies was ingenious.
However, at the end of Jesus' life,
from His arrest up to His crucifixion,
there was a complete shift in mood.
The religious leaders all of a sudden
seemed to have the upper hand
as they unrestrainedly accused Him of crimes that
He had not committed.
The Roman guards tied him up and
viciously flogged His body, ripping flesh from His back.
They stripped Him naked and
put a royal purple robe on Him to ridicule His kingship.
To add insult to injury,
a crown of sharp thorns was then gored into His head.
As large drops of blood fell from His forehead stinging His eyes,
the guards, kneeling before Jesus in mockery, derided him:

“Hail! King of the Jews!”

After the insults,
they spat on Him and
beat His head with a staff until he was unrecognizable.
They then led Him to be crucified.
In a public place for all to witness,
He was nailed to a cross.

As I saw Jesus’ excoriated body hanging on the cross,
my eyes welled up with tears.
He was weak, passive –
like a helpless lamb led to the slaughter.
I repeatedly cried out at the woeful image on the TV screen,
“Jesus save Yourself!
Don’t let those evil men do that to You!”
But He didn’t resist.
Why wouldn’t He exercise His power and authority as He did in the past?
The once-mighty Jesus –
who demonstrated power over demons, disease, and disaster –
was now a frail, weak, helpless, pitiful body on a cross.
As much as I shouted at the TV screen,
my outcry could not change the tragic end to Jesus’ life.
In my young mind,
Jesus’ death on the cross was the furthest thing from Good News.
Something was wrong with the picture of the crucifixion!
In my mind,
it didn’t make any sense that an innocent, righteous man would suffer and die.
I could only cry out “Why?”
Why God?

You see, it didn’t make sense to me –
before I became a Christian –
that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer.

Why?
because I had read the Bible as a book of do’s and don’ts,
As a book of role models – good guys vs. bad guys,
And honestly, reading the Bible was a means for me to stroke my
ego –

What I had failed to realize is that the purpose of the Bible was to
reveal that I was a sinner in need of repentance –
in need of a propitiation for my sin, for God will bring everything I
have done and every word I have spoken into judgment.
So the zillion dollar question:
How can I be right in front of a holy God who will judge me? never
crossed my mind because I arrogantly thought I was good.

Hence, I didn't need a protagonist that suffered for my sin.
All I wanted was an attractive, cool protagonist in my Bible --
a charismatic hero – a winner, not a loser.
I wanted a Jesus like superman – strong, powerful, formidable;
but here on my TV screen was a Jesus suffering on the cross –
weak, powerless, exposed – dying!
It didn't make any sense to me.
Hence, **Isaiah 53:1** at that time -- applied to me:

**Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm
of the Lord been revealed? Isaiah 53:1**

Just as Peter and the 2 disciples before Christ's resurrection and
just as the Jews during Jesus' time and even to this day,
I couldn't understand the message of Jesus' suffering and dying
and so I failed to believe the message of the Gospel.

In my mind,
not only should a hero be powerful,
he should also be attractive.
But what do we have with Jesus –
Do you know what he looked like?
Was he handsome as the artist Warner Sallman's depiction of
Jesus?
We've all seen this iconic portrait of Jesus.
Jesus with his fair skin and
beautiful blue eyes looking up - solemn.
His long flowing brown hair with highlights.
His clean-cut beard.
Is that what Jesus looked like?

It's curious that the 4 Gospel accounts do not tell us what Jesus
looked like. The only hint we get from the entire Bible is **Isaiah
53:2.**

**He has no stately form or majesty.
That we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be
attracted to Him. Isaiah 53:2**

According to vs. 2,
there was nothing gloriously handsome,
nothing beautiful about him that would incite even an iota of desire
for him.
But rather than desired,
he was despised.
He was rejected by men.

It's interesting that God uses unattractive people – ordinary people.

It's interesting that Jesus and his disciples are so different from the popular mega-church leaders of today.

So often these mega-church leaders win large audiences because admittedly -- they are attractive.

They're cool, charismatic, celebrity-like.

They have glowing hair and

bright white teeth,

polished for television.

They are eloquent in speech –

skilled in story telling –

entertaining, humorous, witty.

They are specialists in whispering those sweet nothings in your ear.

They know exactly what to say to make you feel good.

And that's why they're so attractive.

But we have to be careful –

Jesus had nothing in his appearance

for us to be attracted to him.

Nor did Jesus choose people

who were attractive to be his disciples.

Andrew, Peter, James and John were fishermen –

uneducated men from the countryside with strong country accents.

The critics of Paul said that he was “unimpressive

and Paul's speaking? They said he was contemptible.

According to a 2nd century source,

Paul was bald with a big nose and a monobrow.

We can even surmise from Acts 20 that Paul's preaching was long and boring.

And yes, people fell asleep during his sermon.

In fact, one boy actually died probably because

Paul's sermon was long and boring.

Remember Eutychus?

He fell asleep while Paul was preaching and

fell out of a windowsill of a three-story building and died.

Can you imagine?

Paul coming to our church as an invited preacher and

as he preaches his long sermon on the book of Romans,

we all start falling asleep - some of us even falling off of our chair to the floor?

Sometimes I wonder,

if Paul were here today –
here in Seoul – and he planted a church,
how many people today would attend his church?
It would probably be a very small church.
Would you attend his church?

You see, during Paul's time,
Paul was not popular.
He preached Christ crucified, he preached purely the Gospel.

The ones who were popular –
way more than Paul were the super-apostles (not to be confused
with the Apostles of Jesus like Paul, Peter, James, Andrew, etc.).
I'm talking about the proto-Gnostics – the super-apostles.

Paul calls them "super" in a facetious manner.
He calls them "super,"
not because they were superb preachers or apostles
but because their egos were super inflated.
They claimed superiority over Paul.
You see, they were attractive –
they were probably very rich, they probably wore the best clothing,
they probably spoke very well (articulate, eloquent) and they
promised to meet all your felt needs.
They knew the secrets, the steps, the principles to
attaining your personal goals. Your best life now!
And that's attractive -- even for us today!

And so the super-apostles had a large following.
Like their large following, we too today tend to go where everyone
goes, right? We have a mob mentality.

The popular – yet heretical -- message of these super-apostles
had infiltrated the church and we see Paul in his letters to the
church in Corinth and in Colossae speak against these slick,
polished speakers.

Paul says the super-apostles offered a false Gospel.
A "gospel" that was attractive to human beings –
but "no Gospel at all."
You see, the super-apostles offered more than the Gospel.
Their message was: the Gospel is not enough, you must add
something to the Gospel.
You can shape the gospel message to suit your felt needs.
Thus the "gospel" of the super-apostles was personal, experiential
– subjective,
not like the true Gospel that makes objective claims –

the proclamation that the historical events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection are all yes and amen.

The message of the super-apostles was attractive because it offered the best of man's wisdom.

They focused on the secret knowledge, the steps to glory, power, and riches; the path to health, wealth and prosperity.

But God's wisdom is not the way to health, wealth and prosperity.

No, His wisdom centers around the proclamation of a weak, suffering Messiah that dies on the cross for our sins,

His wisdom is the path of suffering to the cross – the Via Dolorosa.

This is the suffering Messiah according to Isaiah:

"He was despised and forsaken" (Isaiah 53:3).

He was rejected – the Jews had rejected their own Messiah.

If you know the Old Testament well, this should not be surprising:

The Israelites have a long history of rejecting God.

Do you remember when Israel rejected God and demanded a King.

Just to give you some context,

in the days of Samuel,

Israel has no king,

but the nations around them all have kings.

If God is their king, why would they want a king like the nations?

The reason: a king looks 멋있어서 majestic.

While seeing with our eyes, we celebrate physical displays of might, splendor, and excitement.

Like North Koreans, we are attracted to and trust in a powerful leader, a royal palace, a stately fortified city.

In the same way, as the Israelites looked at the surrounding nations with their majestic kings, the Israelites make demands to Samuel.

In 1 Samuel the Israelites say:

... "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel ... And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying; it is not you they have rejected, but **they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods 1 Samuel 8:6-8**

Can you believe it?

The very God that had rescued them from the Egyptians, from all their enemies -- this God, Israel would rejected –

all for the splendor of an earthly king.

We don't want an invisible God –
we want something attractive –
someone we can see with our eyes!

And so, from His very lips,
God says of Israel, "They have rejected me!"

And 1000 years later,
they would do the same with Jesus,
the King of Kings, the King of the Jews.

And not only the Israelites,
and not only the Jews,
but we too do the same today.

We all want beauty,
we all want power, we all want majesty –
it's part of our human nature –
and that is why both Jew and Gentile had despised and forsook
the Messiah.
In Isaiah 53:3 it states,

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows,
and acquainted with grief. (Isaiah 53:3)

Not only was the Messiah rejected by men,
but he also suffered greatly at the hands of men –
He was a man of sorrows.
He was acquainted with our grief.

All of us suffer because of original sin –
the sin of our forefather Adam.
And today we sin against God and
sin against neighbor –
everyday – all the time.
And because sin is like cancer –
it grows and spreads –
it metastasizes quickly.

We live in a world full of suffering and grief.
And if we can just own up to our sin,
we would admit
we have brought our suffering upon ourselves.

But Jesus – the righteous one –

did not deserve any of the sufferings he suffered.

But He became like us –

“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”

-- sorrow and grief you and I have had a taste of.

Our religion is a strange one to the world. It is a religion that teaches that God voluntarily came down to be rejected and to be despised and to suffer by the hands of those He created.

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God ...
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness...
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death ... on a cross! Phil. 2:6-8

No other religion has anything like this.

The Muslims deny that Jesus died on a cross.

The Jews deny that Isaiah 53 is talking about Jesus.

This doesn't make any sense to non-believers.

That's why the passage starts with

“Who has believed our message?”

It's hard to believe Isaiah 53 for what it's worth.

How many kings voluntarily decide

to give up their riches,

their splendor and their glory

to live like a servant that

suffers and grieves and dies at the hands of the people he rules?

But this is exactly what Isaiah is prophesying 2700 years ago and

this suffering is exactly what happened 700 years after the prophecy.

He was rejected and we esteemed Him not:

The world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not

He came unto His own, and His own received Him not (John 1:10,11).

Can you believe it?

God was rejected by his own creation.

Why did we reject him?

It is written in Isaiah 53:4:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:4)

All of the pain that belongs to us had been transferred from us to him. And yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

Jesus stooped over dragging a cross
And the people heaped derision on him:
“Look at this pitiful man!
He must be punished by God!”
All those who witnessed the death of Jesus must’ve thought,
How unfortunate – how unlucky for this man!

Even his disciples considered him unlucky.

Brothers and sisters,
This was NOT unlucky –
Not something on a whim.
Not an experiment that spun out of control.
No, this was not an accident.

Sure, to the world,
the suffering and death of the servant would look like a tragedy
but ultimately it’s not a tragedy.
On the contrary, it’s the greatest story ever told.
It’s the greatest event that’s ever happened to humankind.
It is the climax of the greatest drama ever staged.

You see, God called his servant as prophesied 700 years before the crucifixion to bear our griefs and sufferings and sorrows so that one day You and I – believers of this suffering servant – would not have to bear the punishment (the griefs and sufferings and sorrows) we deserve because of our sin.

For our sake, it was the will of the Lord to crush him and that means it was all according to God's redemptive plan.

Under what theologians call
The Covenant of Redemption

- the covenant between the father and the son made before the foundations of the world.
- all according to God’s Redemptive plan to redeem those whom the Father had given His Son.

And praise God Jesus came willingly.

Jesus says,

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. John 10:18

And praise God that Jesus was not distant from us!

No he suffered for us,

for he knew our burdens and temptations for He became:

A suffering servant **acquainted** with our sorrows and our grief

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too **shared** in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil ... For this reason he had to be made like them—fully human in every way, ... that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because **he himself suffered** when he was **tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted**. Hebrews 2:14-18

And according to Hebrews 4, He was,

A suffering servant **acquainted** with our sorrows and our grief

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to **empathize with our weaknesses**, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb. 4:15,16

Brothers and sisters,

God is a God who is acquainted with our suffering, our sorrow, our griefs.

And that is why He shared in our humanity,

He suffered and was tempted like us to help those who have failed in temptation.

He empathizes with our weakness.

He laid his life down for us like a lamb led to the slaughter so that he can help us in our time of need through the Gospel, the power unto salvation.

Praise God for sharing in our humanity,
for empathizing with our weakness, and
for acquainting with our suffering so that
we can receive mercy and grace.

Praise God for the suffering servant!

Let us pray!

Father,

We thank you that we can call you Abba father through your Son's suffering and death on the cross.

We thank you that you are not a distant God.

No, but you sent your Son to be acquainted with our suffering, our sorrow, our griefs.

To share in our humanity,

To suffer and be tempted like so that he can save us

who have failed in temptation.

Thank you Jesus for laying down your life for us like a lamb led to the slaughter so that you can help us in our time of need through your Gospel, the power unto salvation.

Amen