

“He Was Pierced For Our Transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5)

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Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

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Isaiah 53:5: ***“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.”***

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. In the Hebrew language used in Isaiah 53:5, the theologian Delitzsch points out, “[t]here were no stronger expressions to be found in the language to denote a violent and painful death.” (Isaiah, Vol. II, 318) Furthermore, August Pieper in his commentary on Isaiah II (40-66) states that when you combine “pierced” or “wounded” with “crushed” then the idea is “complete personal destruction” (441). Human suffering doesn’t get any worse than this. It is arguable that what our Lord went through in order to save us from sin was quite simply the most inconceivably agonizing pain anyone has ever known.

Lee Strobel in interviewing Alexander Metherell, M.D. and Ph.D. reports that the climatic passion of Christ began in the Garden of Gethsemane where he had prayed all night long. During this time – with what was literally the weight of the world on him – he experienced an incredible amount of psychological stress to the point of experiencing a medical condition called hematidrosis when severe anxiety causes the release of chemicals that break down the capillaries in the sweat glands. “As a result, there’s a small amount of bleeding into these glands, and the sweat comes out tinged with blood (The Case for Christ, 195).” But this was just the beginning for Jesus, because this distress made “the skin to be extremely fragile so that when Jesus was flogged by the Roman soldier the next day, his skin would be very, very sensitive (195).” Roman floggings were brutal and usually consisted of 39 lashes but could have easily been much more. “The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with

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metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open with further blows. And the whip had pieces of sharp bone as well, which would cut the flesh severely (195).” I simply can’t describe the effects as these are too graphic, but suffice it to say that many never made it to be crucified, because they would die during the flogging going into hypovolemic shock (196). Here, the heart races to try to pump blood that isn’t there, then the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse, third, the kidneys stop producing urine to maintain what volume is left, and finally, the person starts to crave fluids...and we know Jesus was going through this the entire time as it appears that he required help to carry the cross on the road to Golgotha since Simon of Cyrene was “compelled” (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21) to bear the cross for Christ. It is likely that our Lord was to the point of physical exhaustion and would have collapsed -- if he hadn’t already -- in trying to bear his cross on the road. Furthermore, we see the signs of hypovolemic shock as he said “I thirst” from the cross (Jn 19:28).

All of this had already happened to our Lord *before* the cross. The spikes the Romans used were 5-7 inches long...they were driven through his wrists where the median nerve runs...the pain is so terrible and indescribable that a new word was invented to refer to it: “excruciating” which means “out of the cross” (198). What I’ve just described is terrible, but the worst was yet to come, because “crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. The reason is that the stresses on the muscles and diaphragm put the chest into the inhaled position; basically, in order to exhale, the individual must push up on his feet so the tension on the muscles would be eased for a moment. In doing so, the nail would tear through the foot, eventually locking up against the tarsal bones...As the person slows down his breathing, he goes into what is called respiratory acidosis – the carbon dioxide in the blood is dissolved as carbonic acid, causing the acidity of the blood to increase. This eventually leads to an irregular heartbeat. In fact, with his heart

beating erratically, Jesus would have known that he was at the moment of death, which is when he was able to say, 'Lord, into your hands I commit my spirit.' And then he died of cardiac arrest (198-199)."

Last Sunday I preached on the question "Why?" Why this? So many people are offended that a God of love would require such horrendous suffering in order to save and these same people deny the enormity of sin. What is sin? Some archaic notion of a dying institution called "the church"? What is sin? And this is the litmus test to understanding any of it. There are many ways of describing sin and the straight-forward biblical definition is "lawlessness" (1st John 3:4), but it is also the cause of everything that is painful. Sin rips lives apart; sin destroys. We did not have to wait for the crucifixion to see what sin does. That sin, that pain, that destruction had to be dealt with and there were two options before God: 1) leave on us; OR 2) put it on a Savior and that option was ratified by the Son.

Imagine, while Christ was being arrested he said, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53) Before Pilate, Jesus said to the governor, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above (John 19:11)." For heaven's sake, even the devil knew that Jesus had a choice. He didn't have to do what He was doing! That is why even to the last, the devil tempted him to come down from that cross. Imagine, try to imagine, our Savior did it willingly. He endured what I just described and so much more...*willingly...because He said, "No, the destruction of sin will NOT fall on you! It will fall on me! That is how much I love you!"*

The intensity of the passion of our Savior says that your sin has been robbed of controlling you; it has been robbed of its power to condemn you. Luther explains from a biblical standpoint what was really happening during what Dr. Metherell described from a medical standpoint: "This is the most joyous of all doctrines and the one that

contains the most comfort. It teaches that we have the indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God. When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we could not be liberated from it by anything, He sent His Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon Him, and said to Him: 'Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them.'" (LW 26, 280)

Good Friday means that since the suffering of Christ was the suffering for your sin accomplished, sin has lost its power. So Isaiah 53:5 teaches us of the results for you and for me: namely, peace; namely healing. Instead of sin ruining our lives, we have peace with God. He will help us since Christ has already paid the price. We are invited now to call on Him. Instead of sin destroying our lives, we have Christ who tasted destruction for us so the winds of destruction are Satan's deceptions...he tries so hard to keep you in fear; but the evil one has already lost the war and we have the proof based on what we will celebrate in three days. So again, we are now invited to call on Him. Sin is no longer our master; it is no longer our controller; see what Jesus did...there was not a single ounce of pain *not* put on Him...and not simply for what Dr. Metherell described...that pain was in fact infinitely worse for two basic reasons: 1) pain is worse when it falls on the innocent, and there has never been anyone as innocent as our Savior; and 2) because the condemnation and wrath behind the physical suffering was the wrath for your sin, and your sin, and your sin, and your sin, and...and for the sins of the world. But His blood was stronger than all of these and His love was infinitely stronger than all of these...because He stayed. He stayed on that cross. So as for your sin...as for your pain...as for your hopelessness...look at Jesus, listen to what He said, "It is finished." (Jn 19:30)