The Cross of Calvary

The Purpose of the Cross

Isaiah wrote about the purpose of the Cross in about 600 B.C.

"He took up our infirmities; He carried our sorrows; He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us <u>peace</u> was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed." (Is. 53:4-6)

The Holy Spirit leaves us no room for doubt as to the **purpose** and the **cause** of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. The word 'substitution' is not actually used, but the language is unmistakably clear. This One with a marred face was bearing the 'griefs' and 'sorrows' of others. His wounds were for their transgressions and the bruises on His body were for their iniquities.

"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." (Is. 53:6)

Isaiah saw this picture of the One wounded and beaten but he didn't know how. As a prophet he becomes a spokesman for the whole human race.

We see His terrible sufferings. We see Him ***"stricken, smitten by God and afflicted"***. But we are the ones who have 'gone astray'. We have turned ***"everyone to his own way".*** But Father God laid on Him – the Holy Son of God – the iniquity of us all.

So we have briefly portrayed in Isaiah the result of the Fall in Eden and the cause and purpose of the Cross.

Independence from God is the very essence of sin. For every one of us going our own way ends in transgression and iniquity. This applies to all human beings that have been brought into the world but there is a second "all" that proclaims the atoning sacrifice for everyone who is under the curse of sin.

The Death of the Cross

Isaiah 53:7-9, ***"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 its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgement He was taken away …. For He was cut off from the land of the living for the transgressions of My people. He was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death though He had done no violence nor was any deceit in His mouth."***

This is how Isaiah depicts the obedience unto death of the Suffering One. He sees Him as a sheep in the hands of the shearers – dumb and passive and as a lamb being led to slaughter – innocent and powerless consenting to be led to the slaughter as a victim in the hands of sinful men. ***"Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross."*** (Phil. 2:6)

How literally the Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in each detail in the New Testament Gospels! We see this when the Lord Jesus stood before Pilate – ***"When accused, He answered nothing."*** (Mt. 27:12) Even the Governor Pilate marvelled! ***"By oppression and judgement He was taken away"*** outside the city wall to the place called Calvary and ***"as for His generation"*** (the people of His own nation and time), who among them considered **the apparent tragedy being enacted in their midst?**

"Cut off from the land of the living" in the very prime of his life, how few realised that it was ***"for the transgressions of his people".*** It is interesting that these were the verses read by the Ethiopian eunuch in the presence of Philip in Acts 8:26-35.

How few in Jerusalem during this terrible time considered – pondered over – the Scriptures that Isaiah and other prophets of the Old Testament had given them about the man, the Lord Jesus, whom they crucified.

But our 'Man of Sorrows' knew! He said that every step of his path must be ***"as it is written"***. As He set His face to go on His last journey to Jerusalem it was with the words, ***"All the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished in the Son of Man. For He will be delivered up, mocked, shamefully treated, spat upon and they will scourge and kill Him."*** (Lk. 18:31-53)

The Lord Jesus said, ***"It is written"*** when Judas betrayed Him and when the disciples forsook Him and again after He had risen from the dead. He reminded them that when He was with them He had tried to prepare them for His Cross by telling them that, ***"All things must be fulfilled that were written in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms."*** (Lk. 24:44)

But Isaiah not only foretold the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus, but the very manner of His burial. His death would be among the wicked, but He who had been despised and rejected by men would be ***"with the rich in His death"***. This was literally fulfilled. The person prepared by God to carry out His plans was Joseph of Arimathea ***"a prominent member of the council"*** (Mk. 15:43) who ***"was looking for the Kingdom of God"*** and was probably a secret disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Joseph had sat in the court that condemned ***"the Righteous One"*** (the Lord Jesus) but he had not ***"consented to their counsel and deed"***. He must have marvelled, together with Pilate, at the extraordinary silence of the Lord Jesus. I am sure that Joseph, in his heart and mind, echoed the verdict of Pilate that ***"there was no cause worthy of death found in Him"***!

So, unable to save the Lord Jesus from His accusers, Joseph did what he could as soon as the sentence of death had been carried out, by going boldly to Pilate and asking for the body of the Lord Jesus so he could reverently lay it in his own new tomb.

Isaiah 53:10, ***"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer and though the Lord makes His life a guilt offering, He will see His offspring and prolong His days and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand."***

On Mount Moriah Abraham had said to Isaac, ***"God will provide Himself a lamb"*** (Gen. 22:8). Isaiah tells them that the Lamb provided by Father God was the Lord Jesus.

Before this, a worshipper in the Old Testament had to bring the sacrifice, but when God provided the Lamb (His Own Son) and laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, there would be absolutely nothing at all for them to do but accept the provision made for them.

The One who had grown up before the Father as a ***"tender plant"*** is ***"put to grief"*** by the express will of God the Father. It was His sovereign will to ***"bruise Him"***.

In this passage we see the Cross from the standpoint of our Father God who ***"So loved all of us in the world that He spared not His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all."*** (Jn. 3:16) The Lord Jesus ***"humbled Himself"*** and gave Himself up to death as a ***"Lamb led to the slaughter"*** and as a ***"sheep in the hands of the shearers opening not his mouth".***

The Result/Fruit of the Cross

Isaiah 53:10-11, ***" … He will see His offspring and prolong His days and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand. After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous servant will justify many and He will bear their iniquities."***

So the death of the Lord Jesus is seen in harmony with one of the great laws of God – **the law of fruitfulness**. Crucified, the Lord Jesus is said to ***"prolong His days"*** through the seed bearing fruit. The pleasure of the Lord is in seeing fruit after His own image. This is the fundamental law of **sacrifice for fruitfulness**.

The yearning of our Creator God for fellowship with beings created in His own likeness is one of the greatest mysteries in the revelation of the heart and character of our God. ***"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."*** (Gen. 1:26) This is what God said after He had created this beautiful earth by His Word, but with no beings upon it answering to His heart.

But grieved over 'the Fall' of that first creation in Genesis 3, God the Son gives His life on Calvary for the birth of a new race – a re-creation of those who had gone astray and had turned everyone to his own way. In His death, the Lord Jesus made "many righteous" through bearing their sins. Now God sees the fruit of His "work" and is satisfied!

The new birth for the fallen children of the first Adam is the fruit of the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. At the beginning of His public ministry on earth Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be 'born again'. He explained that this was true for all people – in fact for the whole human race.

For this to happen, ***"The Son of Man must be lifted up"***. (Jn. 3:14-16) In this way He became the source of eternal life to them.

The Victory of the Cross

Isaiah 53:12, ***"Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great and He will divide the spoils with the strong because He poured out His life unto death."***

Another aspect of the Cross is shown to us here. One called ***"the strong"*** is mentioned. The language used suggests a battle and the dividing of the spoils on winning the fight. Isaiah speaks of the ***"prey of the terrible"*** and the deliverance of the ***"captive of the just"*** from ***"the mighty"***.

Isaiah also said that the spoils are given to the "Man of Sorrows" because ***"He poured out His soul unto death"*** and because ***"He was numbered with the transgressors"***.

The Cross is not only about the bearing of our "iniquities" so we can be healed. It is also the guilt offering for our sins through which we have been made righteous. It is also the 'labour period' for the birth of a new race of people in the likeness of the Son of God. Above all, it is a battle with a terrible enemy for the deliverance of all those held in his power.

This is in agreement with other Scriptures. In a vision David saw the ascended Lord leading ***"captivity captive"*** (!) into the sanctuary on high. The inspired writer of Hebrews says, ***"Through His death the Lord Jesus brought to nothing the devil that He might deliver all those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage."*** (Heb. 2:15)

It is written that He took the spoils from the strong because He was ***"numbered with the transgressors"***. In perfect obedience to His Father's will, He accepted and drained the cup of suffering and death. How can we ever begin to fathom what it meant to Him ***"who knew no sin"*** to be ***"numbered with the transgressors"*** and ***"made sin on our behalf"***? (2 Cor. 5:21)

This view of Calvary may help to reveal to us one cause of the victory of the Lord Jesus over 'the Terrible One' – Satan. The devil had sought to be exalted even as our most high God. But the Son of God humbled Himself and consented to be made lower than the lowest. (Phil. 2:9)

Calvary in its depth of apparent shame on earth was, in reality, the highest exaltation in heaven!!