

THE MESSIAH WILL DELIVER YOU

ISAIAH 53:4-6

Lou Johnson, a 1965 World Series hero for the Los Angeles Dodgers, tried for 30 years to recover the championship ring he lost to drug dealers in 1971. Drug and alcohol abuse had cost him every memento and keepsake from that magical season – his uniform, his glove, his bat and that ring. When Bob Graziano, then Dodger president, learned that Johnson’s ring was about to be auctioned on the Internet, he immediately wrote out a check for \$3,457 and bought the ring before any bids were posted. He did for Johnson what the former Dodger outfielder had been unable to do for himself. Johnson had been drug free for years and working in the Dodgers front office at the time. He wept when Graziano gave him the ring. Johnson said, “It felt like a piece of me had been reborn.” *Occasionally*, you still hear about someone doing something really great for somebody else.

But there’s a far more wonderful story of self-sacrifice and love that is our focus this morning. It’s the story of Jesus dying on the cross for you and me. Oddly enough, however, we’re not going to read about it in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John which were written after that event. Instead, we’re going to read about in the book of Isaiah which was written some 700 years before Jesus was even born. God revealed to Isaiah, a Jewish prophet, that one day He was going to send a very special deliverer into the world to save not only Jewish people but people all over the world. This deliverer was to be the Messiah – a title that is very close in its meaning to another title “Christ.” Jesus Christ is the Messiah. This special message from God is found in Isaiah 52 and 53. Now, I’ve been calling this series of messages “A Portrait of Jesus Before He Came.” It’s not a literal portrait of even a description of what Jesus looked like. Instead, it’s a description of what Jesus did and why. Today, we want to focus on 53:4-6. God told Isaiah that this future deliverer was going to do something very special and unique for all of us. He was going to die in our place. The fact is that everyone of us here today is in mortal danger. You need to be saved or delivered. Delivered from what? Delivered by what?

YOU NEED TO BE DELIVERED FROM GOD.

That sounds very strange, doesn’t it? Why do you need to be delivered from God? Isn’t He a God of love, of compassion, and of kindness? Doesn’t God want to forgive your sins and prepare a place in heaven for you? Look again at what we just read a few moments ago. Who pierced and crushed the Messiah according to Isaiah? God Himself did. Look again at v. 6, “All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6 NLT) By the way, that phrase “laid on” doesn’t mean to sort of arrange something on somebody gently. Instead, it conveys the idea of hitting someone with great force. In this same passage, we read, “But it was the LORD’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief.” (Isaiah 53:10 NLT) That word “crush” communicates better to us the true sense of what

happened at the cross. I admit it; it's hard to get your head around the fact that God caused His Son, Jesus, to suffer, but that's exactly what Isaiah says here.

Sin is very serious stuff to God. Fools often mock the seriousness of sin; only fools can do so. We tend to minimize and excuse sin. But God doesn't laugh at sin and He can't overlook it. It's impossible for us to see sin the way God sees it. He sees it in all of its badness and blackness. I recall hearing about a young boy who was enjoying a swimming pool with his cousins one Saturday. The pool featured a pretty imposing high diving platform. The boy's cousins dared him to jump off the platform. From his perspective on the ground, it didn't look so bad. So, up the ladder he climbed and out to the edge he walked. When he looked down, he almost had a heart attack! It looked just too far down from that perspective! Very humiliated, that young boy climbed back down the ladder. How it looks from below only matters if you're planning on staying below. Sin looks far different to you on your level than it does to God on His level.

God is an absolutely holy, righteous, sin-free Being. Yes, He does love sinful people like you and me, but you can't imagine how much God hates sin. The Bible tells us that God's consistent attitude towards sin in any form is anger – a holy anger, a justified anger, but a terrible anger nonetheless. Fortunately, God doesn't get angry like you and I do. Our anger is usually selfish, prideful and malicious. God's anger is clean, good and right. It's anger at the right things for the right reasons. His anger is the anger of a judge who pronounces a sentence on a criminal. Now, if God wasn't angry at sin or if He refused to punish sin, He couldn't really be just. God's anger demands a resolution. It doesn't just fade away with time. He doesn't just get over it. God doesn't just sort of shrug His shoulders, sigh helplessly and say, "Oh well, those people down there just can't help being bad, can they? I suppose I'll just have to forgive them."

In Old Testament times – long before Jesus was born – God instructed the Jewish people to make animal sacrifice a part of their worship. The people were taught that the violent death of an animal offered in sacrifice was necessary to turn away God's terrible anger against their own sin. A perfect animal was brought before the priest. He, then, laid his hands on the creature's head in a solemn act of identification and transference. The animal was then killed in place of the person who brought the animal. What was the lesson? One, my good deeds don't ever cancel out my sinful deeds. Two, my sins deserve a severe penalty: death. Three, because God loves me, He is willing both to provide and accept a substitute for me so I don't have to die for my own sins. The whole Old Testament system of worship was designed to prepare the Jewish people for what God was going to do in and through Jesus on the cross finally and forever.

Now, here's what we must remember. God doesn't ask you to help Him resolve His anger over your sin. That would mean sending you to hell for eternity. Instead, God decided to resolve His own anger by unleashing it upon Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus, on the cross. Was Jesus, then, in some way

God's victim? No, not at all. Jesus wasn't victimized. He freely chose the cross. He knew this was His destiny – the plan and purpose of His Father before the world was even created. So, there it is. God the Father sent God the Son into the world to deliver you from Himself. An uncomfortable truth, a hard truth, a difficult truth, to be sure, but it is the absolute truth. If it would have been possible for God to rescue you in any other way possible, I can assure you that not one drop of Jesus' blood would ever have been shed.

Now, someone will ask, "But what about people who reject Jesus and the deliverance that God offers?" I've come to this conclusion. There are some people who understand what God has done for them and deliberately reject it. They want nothing to do with God. They don't want to submit their lives to God. If you insist on dying for your own sins, God will let you. If you don't think you need Jesus as your substitute – if you don't think it was necessary for Him to die for your sins personally – then God will hold you accountable for your own sins. Since God's standard is perfection, just one sin is enough to send you to hell.

But I believe there are far more people who simply don't yet understand what God has done for them in Jesus. That's where you and I come in. We need to pray for these folk that their hearts will become open to the truth. We need to look for ways to build authentic friendships with them in the hope that one day God will give us the opportunity to talk with them about the significance of what Jesus has done for them. We need to look for opportunities to invite them to a small group meeting, a Sunday School class, a worship service or a ministry task when it's appropriate to do so. People need to know that they need deliverance from God Himself and that God has provided that deliverance through Jesus.

I read about a camp counselor who fell into a deep sleep one night in his cabin. Then, he became dimly aware in the shadowy corners of his mind that ants were crawling all over his body. He didn't want to wake up. He was too tired to deal with a problem that serious, so he denied it at first. "You're only a dream. Please be a dream!" He fought the truth for a long time. Finally, the ants woke him up enough to realize that preferring them away was not going to work. He jumped out of bed, dashed down to the shower house and washed those pesky critters down the drain. Afterwards, he marveled that he hadn't been bitten once when he might well have gotten chewed up! God's grace works like that. We put off repenting because we don't like the awful truth that our sin deserves damnation. We try to deny all those crawling ants! And then somehow God breaks through and, in a grace induced panic, we run to Him for cleansing and deliverance. God's grace helps people know there's something terribly wrong and then He gives us the privilege of sharing with them God's plan of deliverance. You need to be delivered from God. But, here's a second truth:

YOU NEED TO BE DELIVERED BY GOD.

Please notice something very significant in Isaiah 53:4-5 (NLT). Notice Isaiah's use of personal pronouns to underline the truth that the Messiah would be your substitute. "Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed." This might well be the clearest statement in the entire Bible that the guilt of your sin and mine was placed on the Messiah, who is Jesus.

Now, please notice something else. Those words "pierced" and "crushed" in v. 5 are the strongest words in the original Hebrew for an excruciating and violent death. Again, 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah depicts Jesus' suffering on the cross accurately and graphically. Outwardly, Jesus was indeed pierced, disfigured and lacerated. Inwardly, Jesus was bruised, crushed and broken in spirit and mind. The terrible irony – and Isaiah predicted this as well - is that the great majority of those who actually watched Jesus die thought He was being crucified for His own sins. But, no, this was deliverance from God by God Himself! The Messiah was dying for their sins, your sins, and my sins. Now, don't ever think of God as some pouting, irrational, hothead sitting on His throne in heaven just waiting to blow you up. And don't ever think of Jesus having to twist His Father's arm to convince Him somehow to be merciful to you. From the beginning, Father and Son shared this plan to bring you, me and countless others into God's forever family.

Before I close today, let me underline two marvelous results of this deliverance by God. The first one is peace. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5 NIV) That sense of being OK with God... that sense of personal wholeness... that awareness of why you're here and what matters is pretty elusive stuff in this stressful, anxiety filled world. Why? The deepest reason is this: unconfessed sin and unforgiven guilt. Until that happens, you can't be at peace with God. Now He offers that peace as a gift – peace with God - but you do have to reach out and take that gift by faith. How does it happen? You come just as you are and you receive it as a gift.

A dirty, ragged boy wanted to be admitted to an orphanage in London. The head of the orphanage said to him, "But I don't know who you are. Who are you? What have you to recommend you?" The boy just held up his ragged coat and said, "If you please, sir, I thought these here would be all I needed to recommend me." They let him in! When you stand before the door of heaven seeking admission, no one will ask you about either your accomplishments or your references. As for me, I'll just use the line from that wonderful old hymn: "Nothing is my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

Once you make peace with God, then the peace of God can begin to flow into your life. It's that sense of God's love holding you up and surrounding you at all

times, that sense of God's presence filling your life each day, and that awareness of God's power flowing into all of your life's circumstances – even the very difficult ones. The Bible says that it's a peace that passes understanding. Now, I'd be less than honest if I told you that followers of Jesus don't have times of discouragement, frustration, grief, anxiety, heartbreak and stress. Experiencing and keeping the peace of God isn't always automatic. I've found that sometimes I have to pursue the peace of God – kind of fight for it! But here's the difference. Followers of Jesus don't have to put up with having your life dominated by all that difficult stuff. Because the really big issues of life have been settled once and for all – your sins are forgiven, you know God loves you and you've put your trust in Jesus for this life and for eternity – then life can be increasingly filled with authentic joy, real meaning, sincere laughter and great purpose.

Here's another result of God's deliverance: love. I know Isaiah doesn't use the word here, but it's present in every line of these verses. Aren't you glad today that God's love doesn't depend on you deserving it or earning it? God loves you despite who you are not because of who you are. I know God has still so much more to do in Rick Breusch. There's still hidden, spiritual sludge in my heart that has to be cleaned out. There's still these pockets of faithlessness here and there. But, I know God loves me and that He loves you with a passion, a completeness and a tenacity that is beyond our understanding. I love how the Bible itself puts it: "I pray that Christ will live in your hearts by faith and that your life will be strong in love and be built on love. And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love— how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is. Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19 NCV)

Auschwitz: 4 million Jews died there in World War 2. A half a ton of human hair is still preserved. The showers that sprayed poison gas still stand. But for all the ugly memories at Auschwitz there is one of unspeakable beauty. It's the memory Franciszek Gajowniczek has of Maximilian Kolbe. In February 1941, Kolbe was imprisoned at Auschwitz. He was a Roman Catholic priest. In that brutal, harsh place, he maintained the gentleness of Christ. He shared his food. He gave up his bunk. He prayed for his captors. He was soon given the nickname "The Saint of Auschwitz." In July of that year there was an escape. It was the custom at Auschwitz to kill ten prisoners for every one who escaped. All the prisoners would be gathered in the courtyard and the commandant would randomly select ten names from the roll book. Then, immediately, those ten victims were taken to a cell where they received no food or water until they died.

So on this occasion, the commandant calls out the names. When his name is called, each prisoner steps forward. The tenth name called that day is Franciszek Gajowniczek. He begins to sob, "My wife and my children." But then another prisoner leaves his row and pushes his way to the front. It's Maximilian Kolbe. No fear on his face. No hesitancy in his step. He is ordered to stop or be

shot. "I want to talk to the commander," Kolbe says calmly. Kolbe stops a few paces from the commandant, removes his hat and looks the German officer in the eye. "Herr Kommandant, I wish to make a request please." For unknown reasons, he isn't immediately shot or clubbed to death on the spot. "I want to die in the place of this prisoner." He points to the sobbing Gajowniczek. "I have no wife and children. Besides I am old and not good for anything. He's in better condition." Kolbe knew the Nazi mentality well enough. "Who are you?" the officer asks. "A Catholic priest." The entire prison block is stunned. Even the commandant is momentarily speechless. Then he barks, "Request granted."

Prisoners were never allowed to speak. Gajowniczek said later of that moment, "I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly believe what was going on. The immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me – a stranger. Is this some dream?" The Saint of Auschwitz outlived the other nine. In fact, he didn't die of thirst or starvation. He died only after the camp doctor injected phenol into his heart. It was August 14, 1941. Fransiszek Gajowniczek survived the Holocaust. He made his way back to his hometown. I'm sure he's passed on now. But every year on August 14th for as long as he lived he went back to Auschwitz. He went back to say thank you to the man who died in his place.

Every single person here today had Someone willingly and voluntarily die in your place. His Name is Jesus. He delivered you from God. He delivered you by God.