

## The Good News About Jesus

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Isaiah 53

If you are looking for flattery, the Bible is not really the place to look.

*The* most enduring biblical image of them all is the sheep. Sheep are not incredibly impressive, not especially clever, and not particularly strong in the face of danger. And we just read from the prophet Isaiah – we are *all* like sheep.

If you're looking for *love* however, then there is no richer storehouse than the Scriptures. For if we are sheep, the Bible tells us that God is a shepherd. A shepherd fiercely committed to his silly and stubborn flock. A shepherd who will risk life and limb to go out in search of even one lost little lamb.

In the book of Acts, which documents the growth of the church after the events of Easter, we are told about perhaps the very first African convert to Christianity. We do not know his name, but we know he was an Ethiopian eunuch. Given that he was a eunuch, he would have lived most of his life in the constant awareness of his own sheep-like insignificance.

And yet, on a desert road all alone, God sought this lost sheep and revealed to him the very depths of love in the good news of Jesus Christ. And it all started with the same passage from the prophet Isaiah that we just read together today.

Let me read to you Acts Chapter 8

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." <sup>27</sup> So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,<sup>28</sup> and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup> The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

<sup>30</sup> Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

<sup>31</sup> "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup> This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.*

<sup>33</sup> *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.*

*Who can speak of his descendants?*

*For his life was taken from the earth."*

<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Of course we don't know exactly what Philip said to this man. But today, we are going to do the same. Beginning with this very passage of Scripture in Isaiah 52 & 53, let us consider the good news of Jesus. As we do, we will see how this passage is a *remarkable prophecy* about a *remarkable person*, which is *remarkably personal Good News*.

## **A Remarkable Prophecy**

Firstly, this is a remarkable prophecy. Philip may have begun by answering the Ethiopian's question: no, the prophet is not speaking about himself, he is speaking about someone else, he's speaking about Jesus.

Listen again to the suffering of Isaiah's servant, and see the suffering of Jesus.

Many were appalled at Jesus, as his appearance was disfigured and marred. Jesus was despised and rejected by mankind. Jesus was a man of suffering, familiar with pain, and as he suffered on the cross he was despised and held in low esteem.

Like the Servant of Isaiah, Jesus was punished, stricken, afflicted, pierced, crushed, wounded, oppressed, judged, cut off.

I read this with someone early last year who had recently started exploring again their Christian faith and it was like they had to pick up their jaw off the floor. The suffering of the Servant reads like a plain description of Jesus' suffering, not a prophecy from 700 years before his death on the cross.

It's a remarkable prophecy to be sure. But even more remarkable is the person – the Servant himself – who is the subject of Isaiah's words.

## A Remarkable Person

For to be a Christian is not simply to believe a set of abstract propositions, but to trust a *living* person. Philip didn't sit down and explain to his new Ethiopian friend his philosophical system. No he told him the *good news about Jesus*.

Why? Because the repeated note struck by Isaiah is not simply the fact of the Servant's suffering. Rather, it is who the Servant is suffering **for**.

In verse 4: he took up *our* pain, and bore *our* suffering. Verse 5: he was pierced for *our* transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. It was his punishment that brought *us* peace. By his wounds *we* are healed.

We have put all of our trust in Jesus because in his suffering he has given all of himself to us, and all of himself for us. And we see this most clearly as we read on into Isaiah 53 verse 6. For what we see in this verse is *what we are like, what we deserve, and then what Jesus gives to us*.

Who are we according to the prophet? We are sheep who have wandered away. Like sheep, sometimes we simply don't know what's best for us, and make unwise and foolish decisions. We know this don't we? Even our best intentions can land us and others in difficulty and danger. And so often we find ourselves helpless in our wanderings.

But we are not only foolish sheep. We are wilful rebels. Isaiah says, *we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way*. We have not only wandered but we have *turned*. We reject the Kingship of God over his creation and seek to run our own lives for our selves. By nature, all of us cling to our own control, and we seek to remove every obstacle to our own self-rule – even God himself.

And both our folly and our rebellion leave us full of iniquity. Now that's not a word your likely to use in your everyday life. If you were, you might say about a broken tool that it is full of iniquity. You could say that a dodgy builder erected a house of iniquity. It means to be bent out of shape, broken, or crooked, no longer fit for purpose. See, we were made to know God and to love God and to listen to God, but in cutting ourselves off from our creator we find ourselves twisted out of shape. It was Augustine who said that "the essence of sin is *disordered love*." For instead of seeking satisfaction in the God who created us, we seek it in all the wrong places: in our selves, and in other people, and in the stuff of this world.

And so what do we deserve?

In a very real sense you can say that the sheep who wanders from the flock deserves any danger or even death that it faces as a result of its folly.

The rebel to the King deserves to be punished for his treason.

What is broken or twisted deserves to be destroyed or discarded for it is no longer any use.

Again, if you want to be flattered, the Bible is not the book for you. The word of God is like a mirror that shows us exactly what we are like. But, for the person who dares to look, the Bible is also a window into the remarkable grace of God.

For though we deserve affliction, and deserve punishment, and deserve destruction – what does Jesus give us? He gives us himself, in our place. Isaiah says, the Lord has laid upon him *all* of our iniquities. He took all our brokenness on himself and faced the destruction we deserve.

Jesus died a rebels death on a Roman cross, taking the punishment that we deserve for our rebellion against God. And Jesus became a helpless little lamb, led silently to the slaughter. And while we wander aimlessly into affliction, Jesus willingly surrendered himself to suffering so that by his wounds we could be healed.

At the heart of Easter is the sacrificial death of Jesus – so that lost sheep can be found, wicked rebels can be forgiven, and broken sinners like you and me can be restored and redeemed.

And when the writers of the New Testament were searching for how to describe what they had seen and come to understand about Jesus' death upon a cross – they could only describe it in the most deeply personal way imaginable. What is so remarkable about Jesus is his *love*.

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [A SUBSTITUTE] for our sins. (1 John 4:10)*

*For God so loved the world, he gave his one and only Son, that whœver believes in him should not perish but have eternal life! (John 3:16)*

The heart of Easter reveals to us the very heart of Christ. Jesus sees us in our foolishness, and wickedness, and brokenness and he does not reject us, but goes to hell and back in order to create a Kingdom that has us in it.

*Here is love, vast as the ocean; Loving kindness as the flood  
When the Prince of Life, our Ransom; Shed **for us** His precious blood*

## Remarkably Personal Good News

**For us.** For **you.** This is remarkably personal Good News. And it is extended to each and every person in this room – Christ died *for* you.

You can imagine Philip saying this to the Ethiopian eunuch! The prophet is speaking about Jesus; Jesus the Son of God, and the Servant of God, who came down to serve you and to save you by suffering as your substitute, stepping in to take your place and to rescue you from what your sin deserves. And in this love of Jesus, is everything that you have ever been searching for.

For it does beg the question doesn't it. What was this African man doing so far from home? Why did he travel such a long distance, and why was he so intently reading the Jewish scriptures?

It seems to me that he must have been *searching* for something. He was searching for something that he had not been able to find in his position of power and influence, or in all his wealth and possessions. As a eunuch he had not been able to find it in family or children. Whether he knew it or not: he was searching for God.

Over the last year I have been reading through the whole Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis. They are amazing. And if you wanted to explore more the beauty and power of Easter, you could do much worse than picking up the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe again. But it is interesting don't you think that when Lewis wanted to create a character that most reflected the God of the Bible, he came up with Aslan – a great and powerful, and also terrifying, lion. As Mr Beaver says to one of the children who asked if the great Lion was safe:

*"Safe?" said Mr Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe?"*

*'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."*

But so many people today would much prefer to see God as a little cat rather than a great lion. And I wonder if we reduce God to a purring cat who panders to our own desires, because deep down we know that we *wouldn't be safe* before a roaring lion who rules the universe. We know how much we have fallen short of the standard of God's perfection, and so how little we deserve to stand in his presence.

But in denying the reality of our great guilt, we also cut ourselves from the riches of God's love. Our culture has decided that everything is permissible, only to discover that now everything is meaningless. We have denied the majesty of Aslan, and lost the magic of Narnia.

But Easter tells us that God is a mighty lion who became like a lamb led to the slaughter. Of course he isn't safe, but he's good! He's the King I tell you. And He is the King who stoops to serve, who uses his power in perfect love, and whose glory and greatness is most clearly seen in his magnificent goodness.

And the Ethiopian Eunuch hears this message and he recognises in the good news of Jesus *everything he has been searching for*. This is not a message of divine flattery, it is a message of divine love. And in the perfect love he the object that all his disordered loves were meant to be directed to all along. And as you keep reading in Acts 8 he says, "stop the chariot", there's some water, can I get baptised right away. And he receives from God the full forgiveness of his sins, and the fullness of life that is freely offered in the cross of Jesus Christ.

**Isaiah 56.**

And so can I ask you today, what are you searching for? What is it that rules your life? Is it money, or success, or power, or influence, or your children, or a some sort of legacy? What do you think you really need, and what do you most deeply desire?

For Easter reveals to us that our greatest need is God's forgiveness. And our deepest desires can only be satisfied by the God who made us. And the Good News of Jesus is that by his suffering death on the cross, these things are freely given to all who place their trust in the remarkable person of Jesus Christ.

And so if you are here today and you are not a Christian, and you hear this message and it doesn't make you want to stop the chariot, turn your life around, and receive from God what is freely offered in the cross of Jesus Christ, then you can be certain you haven't understood what Easter is all about. And so keep searching, keep looking, maybe even pray and ask God to show you Jesus. The God who could prophesy the death of Jesus 700 years before it happened, can certainly hear your prayers, and reveal himself to you now.

Or maybe you are not a Christian, but you have found yourself being drawn more and more to the person of Jesus. And you're not sure what it might mean for you, but there is something needling away at your heart. Dear friend, that is the Holy Spirit of God at work in you, seeking you out like he did the eunuch on the dessert road. So do not ignore it or brush it aside. Even today, *come to Jesus*, and receive all the benefits of his sacrifice. Please come and speak to me, or Simon, or Kathy, or Steph, or your friend or family member who brought you today, we would love to speak with you about Jesus.

And brothers and sisters, those of us who follow Christ. Today, will you marvel again at the love of God displayed on the cross. Will you revel in the full forgiveness of your sins won through Jesus' sacrifice in your place. And will you live into the fullness of life that is only found in Christ.

For,

*Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)*