

BODY AND BLOOD

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Scripture: Isaiah 53: 6

This verse is going to be key in our understanding of everything else that I'm going to be talking about today. So, I'm not expositing this verse, but it connects very well to all that I want to say this morning.

Isaiah 53: 6

*"All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him."*

But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all, all of us, the sheep who have gone astray to fall on Him.

I think that this is such a wonderful gift for all of us to be here together. And in a little while, we're going to do something that the church has been doing ever since the night Jesus sat around with His closest friends, His disciples, broke bread, and then poured wine. We're going to take communion.

And for many of us, this is something we know very well. we know the rhythm of it – how the bread feels in our hand, how it feels when we dip it in the cup, the words that are spoken. and honestly, that familiarity is beautiful. It means this table has become home for us. But I'd love for us to do something together. Before we come to the table this morning, I want us to take a journey – not to the upper room, not to that quiet night of institution, but to what happened between that night and the resurrection.

Because what happened in between is what gives the bread and this cup its weight. And I think sometimes in the comfort and the routine of this moment, it's possible for us to drift from that weight without even realizing it.

So let's recover it together as beautifully and gently and as sweetly as we can. Let's start at the beginning.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED TO JESUS?

By the time Jesus was nailed to the cross, He was already barely recognizable. The Roman scourging before the nails, before the thorns, before the cross was one of the most brutal forms of punishment in the ancient world. The whip, called a flagellum, was made of multiple leather strands weighted with bone and metal. And each stroke tore into the flesh, pulling away skin and exposing muscle. That was the idea. There was no fixed limit on the number of strokes. It was decided by the centurion and it was okayed by Roman law. And many men died from the scourging alone before they even reached the cross.

Isaiah saw this centuries before it happened. In one of the most tender and yet haunting passages in all of scripture, he described what the coming servant of God would look like. "His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and His form beyond that of the children of mankind." Beyond human semblance – so broken, so disfigured that He no longer looked like a person. That's not poetry. That's the specific physical reality of what was done to His body.

And then Isaiah goes further. He says, “He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. And upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, peace with God the Father. And with His stripes we are healed. Stripes – the marks left by the whip. Seven hundred years before it happened, Isaiah was describing a body being broken, and he was describing Jesus.

And then came the nails, the crown of thorns pressed into His scalp, the cross carried through Jerusalem on a body already exhausted and shredded until He collapsed. Simon of Cyrene was the one who was pushed to help Him carry that cross.

And then nails driven through wrists producing, we know now, an agony that radiates through the entire arm with every breath. And then the suffocation of crucifixion. The only way to breathe was to push up on the nails in the feet and the hands. Every single breath became a decision between suffocation or unbearable pain.

Psalm 22: 14-15 lets us hear what was happening on the inside. What was going on in the body?

*“I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax; it is melted within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And you lay me in the dust of death.”*

And then finally, as if that wasn’t enough, the spear was thrust into His side, producing the outflow of blood and water that John records for us as a careful witness, something I don’t think he understood fully, but he knew that it mattered. Medical understanding today recognizes it is the sign of cardiac rupture. His heart had literally burst.

WHY THIS WAY?

And when you read all of this, one of the questions that seems to come up is: Why did it have to be like this? So gruesome? So agonizing? That is a very honest question, I think, because God is all-powerful and if He could have arranged redemption any way He chose, why this? Why the suffering, scourging, the nails, the hours of agony? Couldn’t it have been done quietly? Couldn’t it have been done a little easier than the way it was?

UNDERSTANDING WHAT SIN IS.

To find the answer, we have to understand what sin actually is. And I say that gently because sometimes we use that word so often that it loses its sense of gravity. Scripture, on the other hand, doesn’t describe sin as just a mistake or a falling or a failing. Scripture describes it as something with genuine moral weight; a rupture in the relationship between us and the God who made us. A debt that is real and that has to be dealt with somehow.

When we read Hebrews 9:22, it gives us the hinge on this whole argument because the writer says, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.” And that isn’t arbitrary. It runs all the way back to Leviticus 17, where God explains why blood matters. It says, “The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls.”

What sin ultimately earns if left untouched is death. So the only thing that can deal with sin at its root, the only currency that reaches deep enough is life itself. That’s why the entire sacrificial system of the

Old Testament existed. Every lamb, every offering, every day of atonement was a shadow, a rehearsal pointing towards that one sacrifice that would be sufficient once and for all. And what made Jesus different from every animal sacrifice before Him is that those sacrifices could only cover sin temporarily day after day, year after year. But Jesus, Hebrews tells us, by a single offering, perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14 "One sacrifice sufficient forever."

Here I think maybe the warmest way to say this, that the depth of the suffering was the measure of God's love for you and me. God could, when you think about it, have simply declared us forgiven. But that would have been a pardon without justice. It would have said quietly that what we do doesn't really matter. But that would have been a kind of a lie because what we do really matters. How we treat each other matters. And real love, not a soft, sentimental, comfortable kind of love, but actual love takes what matters seriously.

God doesn't wave it away. He paid it Himself. The severity of the cross isn't God being harsh. It's God being completely and utterly serious about both the weight of sin and the height and the depth of His love for us. The cross is where justice and mercy sit side by side and neither gives way to the other, because the one who requires justice is the very same one who provided the payment as well.

I want us to move to what Matthew says about what happened that day. In the 27th chapter, it says, "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

The curtain of the temple – this wasn't some kind of decorative piece of fabric. It was a massive woven barrier. Historians tell us it was as thick as a man's hand and 60 feet high. It hung between the holy place and the holiest place, the innermost sanctuary where God's presence dwelt. And only one person could pass through it once a year, the high priest on the day of atonement and only carrying the blood of a sacrifice with him.

The curtain had once clear message for everyone who looked at it. You cannot come in. there's something between you and God, and you cannot cross it on your own because inside, the absolute holiness of God is present. And yet, at the exact moment Jesus' body was broken on the cross, that He gave up His spirit, that curtain was torn – not from the bottom up, but from top down. From heaven downward, God Himself reached down and split that curtain because something had just changed forever. The barrier between us and the immediate presence of God had been dealt with in and through the body of Christ.

Again, the writer of Hebrews makes this connection with such beautiful precision. "Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...". No one had that confidence prior to Jesus' death. There was trepidation and there was fear. And now he says, "Since we have confidence to enter the holy places." How? By the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain that is through His flesh.

He is not using vague imagery here. He's saying directly Jesus' body broken, yielded, torn, is the curtain that has been opened. His broken body is the torn veil. His body is the door. Which means that every time we come to this table and hear the words, "This is My body broken for you," we are holding in our hand the very thing that opened the door for us. Every piece of bread reminds us of a broken body that helps give us access to God.

Then the cup. Blood isn't incidental to salvation; it's the very mechanism of it. but let's look at what the blood actually does, because scripture is specific about this.

1 John 1:7 says, "The blood of Jesus, His son, cleanses us from all sin." Cleanses, washes, removes. And Isaiah 1:18 gives us one of the most extraordinary pictures in scripture. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." Scarlet to white. Total transformation of stain.

And Peter describes the cost in terms that should and must take our breath away. He says, "You were ransomed. Not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious, precious blood of Christ." The precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. Not gold, not silver. The most precious currency that exists – the blood of God's own Son.

And Zechariah, centuries before the crucifixion, saw the moment that the world would look at what had been done. "They will look on me on whom they have pierced. They shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child."

And John quotes this prophetic work of Zechariah in his letter, when the soldier's spear opens Jesus' side. And the mourning that Zechariah describes isn't despair; it's the grief of recognition. Finally seeing clearly what was always there – the love that was always coming toward us now seen for what it really is.

That is what the cup at this table holds, not just the memory of sacrifice but the reality of cleansing. Not just a symbol of death but the promise of everything that separated us from God being washed completely away by someone who didn't have to be there, who chose to be there, who chose this for you and for me.

This brings me to the sentence that I think sits right at the heart of what we've been looking at. Paul writes in Romans 5:8, "But God shows His love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ Jesus died for us." Not after we sorted ourselves out, not after we reached some kind of minimum standard of worthiness but while we were still in the very condition that made the cross necessary in the first place. That's when God moved. And notice the direction; the direction is toward us.

Think about it. all of us know what it feels like to be hurt by somebody. And instinctively what we do is we create distance between that person and us. that's a very human response. Our love for other people always tends to be conditional. It flows more easily when people are being kind, when they're moving in a good direction along with us, when they make it easy. But God loved us when we were moving in the opposite direction. We were moving away from Him.

And the evidence of that love is a broken body, spilled blood, a torn veil, and an open grave. It's the most physical, costly, irreversible demonstration of love that the world has ever witnessed. This is love symbolized in a cross.

And so, as we come to this table, let's bring everything that we've kind of walked through till here. The bread isn't a symbol of an abstract idea. It's the body that Isaiah saw, disfigured beyond recognition. The body Psalm 22 describes from the inside. The body that was scourged and nailed and finally broken. And in that breaking became the curtain opened from top to bottom, the new and living way into God's very presence.

The cup holds the blood that every Old Testament sacrifice was pointing toward. The blood that Zechariah foresaw the world one day weeping over in recognition. The blood that Peter calls the most precious thing in existence. The blood that John says cleanses us from all sin. All of it. And Paul tells us that “every time we eat and drink at this table, we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” We’re not just remembering; we are declaring. We are saying to each other and to ourselves, “This really happened. It cost everything and it was done for us, for you and for me.

So, maybe today we come with a little more wonder, not heavy or gloomy. This is not a sad table. This is the table of the one who rose again. but maybe we can come with a kind of awe that slows us down for just a moment and say, “I know what this cost and I’m so grateful. May I never take it lightly again.

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR RESPONSE TO ALL OF THIS?

Maybe a response that needs to be made even as we come and partake of this beautiful memorial. John gives us the beginning of the answer in one of the most beautiful and simple sentences in all of scripture. He says, “We love because He first loved us.” Everything starts there. Not duty, not guilt, not a straining effort to be better. Just love responding to love. The way a flower turns towards light, not because it’s been instructed to, but because that’s what it does naturally when light shines. And love when it really lands in us must begin to change things in us.

Can I take the liberty this morning to show us how that can change?

1. It changes how we see the people around us.
When we’ve genuinely sat with the truth that God loves us at our worst, it quietly makes it more possible to look at the person in front of us, the one who’s difficult or disappointing or hard to be around and find something of the same patience that God showed toward us that we can show toward them. Not always easily, but it opens a door that wasn’t there before.
2. It can change the way we speak.
When something this large is living inside us, the small cruelties start to feel wrong in a way that didn’t before. The harsh word, the unkind remark, the gossip – they start to feel out of place in someone who’s been loved in this incredible way. Not out of guilt, but because of the love inside us that starts to look for ways to flow out of us.
3. It changes what we do with what we have.
When we understand what was given for us, then the things that we hold back, our time, maybe our money, our very presence, our energy begin to look different. Generosity starts to feel less sacrificial and more like participation in something that God is doing.
4. It shows us how we walk through the hard seasons of our lives.
Because if the God who loves us this much loved His own Son to go through the cross, we too can trust Him in the seasons when we don’t understand what He’s doing. We know who He is. We’ve seen what He’s already done. And that becomes enough to stand on even when everything else is shaky ground.

So, here’s where I want us to land as we come to this table. The cross is not one beautiful moment in a long story. It’s the foundation of everything. Every prayer you’ve prayed, every moment of worship that

you've offered, every time you've come back to God after a difficult season, every relationship that's been healed with His help – all of it was made possible by what happened on the cross. All of it.

The access you have to God right now in this room this morning was paid for in blood and opened through a broken body. that's not a metaphor, beloved. That's the most real thing in your life and mine. And the relationship that we have with Jesus, the one that we cultivate through prayer and scripture, or community is built on that foundation.

Which means it doesn't shake when circumstances shake. It doesn't waver when you waver. It's as secure as the cross is permanent. And the cross is permanent.

So come to this table knowing what it cost and yet how freely it is being offered to you. Come with reverence and wonder, not any kind of performance or heaviness. Come as someone who's loved completely by a loving God.

And then, when you leave this place, leave a little differently than you arrived. Leave with the cross more real to you. Leave with His love more vivid, more personal, more yours. Leave as one who has been reminded at depth of why you follow this Jesus. Not out of habit, ot out of expectation, but because of a body that was broken, a vel that was torn, a grave that was emptied, and a love so extravagant that while we were still sinners, He came.

Greater love had no man than this. And He gives up His life for His friend. We love, beloved, because He first loved us.
