Crushed on the Cross for Us

Third in the Lenten Series “Come to the Cross”

# Scripture: Isaiah 52:13- 53:12

# Key thought: As grapes are crushed, so Jesus, the suffering servant, was crushed for our sins.

# Intro:

## Making the grape juice and bread connection

Here at Copper Hill Church, on the first Sunday of the month it is Communion Sunday. Today I would like us to focus on a passage that is very easy to relate to Communion – Isiah 53. As we focus on that passage, I would like us to make a connection in our mind between the language and ideas used to describe the sacrifice of Jesus and the bread and grape juice that we use to observe Communion. I want to suggest that there is yet another connection other than just that the juice is red and so can easily remind us of Jesus’s blood and that the bread reminds us of Jesus’ words that he was the Bread of life. Those are important connections. But there is another one that we can explore today, one that is implied in the language that Isaiah uses and the words that we frequently use in the communion service.

## An important “Servant” passage

The passage we read this morning from Isaiah is one of several special sections in the book of Isaiah which focus on the “servant” of God. Some of the servant passages were interpreted more collectively of the nation Israel. Others need to be interpreted more individually of the coming Messiah. Even among the Jews there was some sense that this servant passage had Messianic overtones.

For us as Christians, there is no doubt that this passage is a wonderful prophetic foreshadowing of the suffering Jesus and of the meaning of his suffering. Martin Luther said of this chapter:

“All Scripture scarcely has a passage equal to this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.”

My new Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible has a chart listing more than thirty times that this chapter may be at least alluded to in the NT. Verse 5 and 6 on which we will be focusing are each quoted by Peter (1 Peter 2:24, 25), They are also alluded to by word or concept 5 more times in the NT. So, these are important verses for understanding what Jesus has done for us.

# The keyword for today is "crushed"

## A key verse

This morning I would like us to focus in on a single verse from the OT – Isaiah 53:5.

We’ll begin by reading it in several different translations. First in the two translations that we use the most – NRSV and NIV.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;   
upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. Isa 53:5 NRSV

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. Isa 53:5 NIV

Now we’ll read it in two translations that give us the overall sense well without trying to translate the individual words quite as precisely.

But because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did.  
We are healed by the punishment he suffered, made whole by the blows he received. TEV Isa 53:5

He was wounded for our rebellious acts. He was crushed for our sins.  
He was punished so that we could have peace,   
and we received healing from his wounds.   
Isa 53:5 GOD'S WORD Translation

I was particularly struck as I prepared this message by two things in this verse. I was arrested in my thoughts by the key phrase, “He was crushed for our iniquities.” I noted the key word “crushed” and began to meditate on it. And then as I studied, I was reminded again and again that the focus of the passage over and over is the purpose for which the suffering servant was crushed – for me and for you.

I note that the key word “crushed” occurs again in V. 10 so that verse also may help us interpret.

## A Key word – “crushed”

We quickly realize that the prophet Isaiah is using the word “crushed” metaphorically in the same what that we often do. Here in CT, we might say, “The Lady Huskies crushed another opponent this past week.” We mean that they won by a large margin again.

I discovered in my study that the word is used frequently in the Bible as a metaphor for defeating someone rather thoroughly – whether justly or unjustly. For example; in Psalm 94:4, 5 it is used of evil-doers;

All the evildoers boast. They crush your people, O Lord, and afflict your heritage. NRSV

Whereas in Psalm 72:4 is it used to describe God’s action against evildoers.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. NRSV

IN Isaiah 53, there are three other words in the verse that communicate to us what the word “crushed” means.

1. The first verb in the verse refers to the fact that Jesus’ body was pierced. It is often translated rather generically as “wounded.” But the root idea of the word is to bore a hole in something (Exhaustive Strong’s on Biblesoft). So, pierce is the best translation. Think of the nails that were driven into his hands and his feet and the spear that literally pierced his side.
2. The third phrase in the verse contains the word “punishment.” In the KJV it was translated “chastisement.” It is a word used to refer to the “correction inflected by a parent on children for their good” (Jamieson Fausset and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database, Biblesoft)
3. The last phrase contains a word which is translated differently in various translations; “stripes” in the KJV, “bruises” in the NRSV, and generically as “wounds” in the NIV. From what I have read, it is an amazing fit for what would have happened to Jesus when he was beaten with a scourge by the Romans.

All three words together help us to understand the word “crushed.” It means that the servant would be physically mistreated to a point near death even before he is killed as Isa 53:7-9 make clear that he would be. He would “suffer” grievously as v. 10 confirms.

Take a moment and compare what happened to Jesus to the prophecy of this chapter. It is instructive to make two or three columns. You could list NT references of the events in a third column.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Isaiah 53 words | What happened to Jesus | NT references |
| 52:14 Appearance marred | Jesus was beaten, struck in the face, and crowned with thorns |  |
| 53:3 Despised and rejected | People chose Barabbas over him; Jewish leaders rejected him. Disciples mostly fled. |  |
| 53:3 Despised, held in low esteem | He was mocked on the cross by Jewish leaders and by one thief |  |
| 53:5 Pierced | Nails pierced his hands and feet; a spear pierced his side |  |
| 53:5 stripes, welts, bruised | Jesus was scourged with whips |  |
| 53:7 he is silent | Before Pilate, they were amazed that Jesus did not defend himself |  |
| 53:7 led like a lamb to the slaughter | Led through the streets to Golgotha |  |
| 53:8 taken away by oppression and judgment | arrested under false pretenses and without the benefit of defense was sentenced to death. |  |
| 53:8 cut-off …from the living | Killed on the cross |  |
| 53:9 grave with the wicked  53:11 numbered with the transgressors | Killed between two thieves |  |
| 53:9 and with the rich | Laid in a rich man’s tomb |  |
| 53:11 See the light of life | Rose from the grave |  |

## The reason the Servant is to be “crushed” - The main point

The next thing I notice in this verse is the surprising reason that the servant of God was to be crushed. It was not for his own doings, but for me and for you. It is clear from multiple verses in this chapter that in some way the Suffering Servant was undergoing all this pain and trial and eventually death itself in order in some way to substitute for me and for you.

Look at the evidence. The truth is seen twice in verse 4.

Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, Isa 53:4 NIV

Four times in verse 5.

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. Isa 53:5 NIV

Once in verse 6.

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isa 53:6 NIV

That one truth is repeated 7 times in three verses. And it occurs at least three more times in the chapter ( vv. 8, 11, 12).

So, we must conclude that it is God’s main message through the prophet. God’s anointed Servant will suffer but not because of his own deeds. It would be a suffering on behalf of others. It would be a suffering in the place of others. It would be a suffering because of which others will benefit greatly.

## How can we understand the Servant’s substitution?

I try not to think of this in theological categories. Rather I seek to understand it by looking into the OT to find background that can help. I find two liturgies from the Levitical practices of the OT which help me very much to get this picture. The first is something that happened regularly as a part of the sacrificial system. The worshipper needed to identify with the sacrifice. Listen to this passage of instructions about the burnt offering.

“‘If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you. Lev 1:3-5 NIV

After this act of identification, the animal was accepted on behalf of the worshipper.

The second similar ritual goes a step further. It occurred on the Day of Atonement described in Lev. 16. It was the high point of the liturgical year for the Jews and was a day of multiple offerings.

First Aaron was to sacrifice sin offerings and a burnt offering. One sin offering was for his own sins to prepare him to make the offering of atonement. Another was a sin offering for the sins of the people of Israel. Blood from this latter sacrifice was taken into the Holy of Holies and put on the top of the Ark of the Covenant to make atonement for the sins of the people. But there was one more goat involved in the liturgy that day.

“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness. Lev. 16:20-22 NIV

In this way God gave to the children of Israel a graphic picture of the condemned animal taking on itself the sin of the people and carrying it away, leaving the worshippers free from the penalty of their sins. This seems to me to be the kind of substitution that Isaiah has in mind in his prophecy. Theologically, the two animals together are giving a picture of what the Suffering Servant would do. He would enter the Holy of Holies in Heaven, so to speak, the very presence of God, having identified with us and shed his own blood for us. And in addition, he somehow would bear away our sin.

The writer of Hebrews had a wonderful grasp of the sacrifice of Jesus.

He [Christ] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.  
 Heb 9:12 NIV

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.   
 Heb 9:24 NIV

Paul understood and expressed the idea that Jesus did all this for us. We are the blessed beneficiaries!

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21 NIV

# The crushing of the fruit reminds us of Jesus' sufferings.

## The grapes and the wheat are crushed

It occurred to me that focusing on this key verse and particularly on this keyword “crushed” is definitely appropriate when it is communion Sunday. For I could not help but note that both of the elements that we use for the communion sacrament, grape juice and bread, come to us after something is crushed.

In the fall, as one drives through this area you can see numerous vineyards. The grapes will be picked and crushed to make grape juice and in some cases wine.

We also use bread at communion. To make the flour from which the bread is made, the grain is crushed. In ancient cultures it was crushed with a pedestal in a hollow stone or bowl. In colonial CT, it was crushed between grinding stones in a water powered mill. Today, steel rollers are used. But still, the grain must be crushed to become flour.

## As the elements are crushed, the body of Jesus was broken

Often when Communion is celebrated, the pastor will intentional break apart a piece of bread as the liturgy proceeds. This corresponds to the part in the liturgy where we read the words of institution from 1 Cor. 11.

Let us remember together our Lord Jesus, who, in the same night that He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take; eat. This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In the traditional KJV the text reads,

“When he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.” 1 Cor 11:24 KJV

That reading emphasizes the connection we are making using elements that have been themselves crushed as they are brought to us, reminds us of how the body of Jesus was mistreated for us—“broken” in the words of the KJV – “crushed” in the words of Isaiah 53:5. We can’t partake of grape juice and bread, elements that come to us because the grapes and wheat have been crushed without remembering the suffering of Jesus.

The first time Jesus showed himself to all his disciples together in the upper room after his resurrection, the apostle Thomas was not there. Thomas was openly skeptical of what the other disciples told him. But the next week, when the disciples gathered, Thomas was present and Jesus came again. He showed Thomas the scars on his hands and feet. Thomas saw the scars on the master and exclaimed “My Lord and my God!”

Every Communion service when we think of the wounds that Jesus suffered for us, how his body was “crushed” as Isiah put it, we too can bow again in our hearts and exclaim, “ My Lord and my God.” That is one of the main purposes for our monthly communion remembrance.

# The Communion cup speaks of our salvation.

Finally, whenever we remember the sufferings of Jesus, we must also remember the reason for his sufferings. As Isaiah said over and over again, it was for us! A quick review is good.

“He has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases;” Isa 53:4 NRSV

The first word means “malady, anxiety, calamity” ( Strongs Biblesoft); the second one means “grief, pain or sorrow.” It could be expanded to say that Jesus has borne our sufferings and our sorrow, our maladies and our mental distresses. Think again of that scapegoat of Lev. 16 figuratively carrying away the sins and guilt of Israel. Then think of Jesus as carrying away so much for us.

Isaiah continues in chapter 53 with further glimpses into the salvation that Jesus would bring.

Isaiah 53:5 says his punishment would bring us peace. Romans 5:1 says that because of Jesus we have peace with God.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God.”   
Rom 5:1

Isaiah 53:10 tells us that the Suffering Servant would be himself made to be an offering for sin and v. 11 tells us that he will be able to bring us justification because he has borne our iniquities. Verse 12 says that the Servant has successfully interceded with God on behalf of sinners. The writer to the Hebrews interprets:

But he [Christ] has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. Heb 9:26-28 NIV

Paul put it succinctly.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. Rom 3:23-24 NIV

Martin Luther, had keen insight into the role that the sacrifice of Jesus played in making our salvation possible. He said,

This merciful forgiveness did not take place without having been merited; a Mediator appeared who earned it for us and in our stead… (Number 1551 in What Luther Says) The forgiveness of sins does not take place without a payment or satisfaction. You, however, do not make this payment; but it cost Christ his life, body, and blood. Therefore, it does you, nay, all the world, no good to sacrifice body and blood; for before God no sacrifice is sufficient to pay for sin (says Scripture) except the one sacrifice of Christ. The fact, then, that He has sacrificed himself for our sin and for the sin of the whole world and gives you his innocence and righteousness – this comes to your aid and drowns your sin and death. (Number 1552 in What Luther Says)

So, when we come to Communion we also remember that what Jesus did, he did for us. It was a gift of love for us. We benefit from Jesus’ obedience, from his trials and sufferings, from his shed blood, and because of his resurrection.

# Conclusion

Thinking of it that way, taking Communion becomes a very humbling experience. It is from first to last a receiving of a gift we did not earn, indeed could not earn. We come to embrace grace that was costly to Jesus, but he gives it freely to us.

In my readings for this week, I found this explanation for Communion from John Wesley, founder of Methodism. He is describing in his journal a talk he gave on the subject.

From John Wesley's Journal (June 28, 1740)

I showed at large: 1 That the Lord's supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities. 2. That the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they want the grace of God, either to restrain them from sin, or to show their sins forgiven, or to renew their souls in the image of God. 3. That inasmuch as we come to this table, not to give him anything, but to receive whatsoever he sees best for us, there is no previous preparation indispensably necessary, but a desire to receive whatsoever he pleases to give. And 4. That no fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our own state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; everyone who knows he is fit for hell being just fit to come to Christ in this as well as all other ways of his appointment.

(Quoted in A Complete Sourcebook for the Lord's Supper, Charles L Wallis, editor p. 73