

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 22
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Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
All for me! All for free!

—Isaiah 53:10-12

The book that we call the Bible is more than just a book. It's really a library made of 66 different books all brought into one volume. Those 66 books were written over a period of some 1,500 years by approximately 40 different authors through the centuries. They contain different kinds of literature: history and prophecy, songs, poetry, words of wisdom. They contain warnings and promises. The Bible tells us what to do and not to do, but it's much more than just an instruction manual. Most importantly, the Bible tells us what God has done for us. The Bible recounts for us God's dealings with our human race, how he made our first parents, how our first parents Adam and Eve rebelled against God and plunged this world into sin, decay, and death, and how God promised to send a Savior and finally delivered on that promise when Jesus came. That thread of salvation is woven throughout Scripture from start to finish. The message of the Bible is consistent from start to finish for a very simple reason: God is the author. The Bible is God's Word. God used human authors to convey the message, but he gave them the exact words he wanted them to write. We call that process *verbal inspiration*, that God's Spirit inspired every word of Scripture and caused it to be written down for us.

Since God is the author and God doesn't lie or change his mind, it doesn't surprise us that the same message of forgiveness and salvation is presented throughout the whole Bible. God is the one doing the talking throughout the whole book, and whether he speaks through Moses the man of God 1,500 years before Jesus is born or whether he uses Saint John (the disciple of Jesus) as his spokesman 90 years after Jesus is born, it's the same message. So again, it doesn't surprise us when the Prophet Isaiah, over 700 years before Jesus is ever born, tells us about the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus seven centuries before it ever happened. God is the author, God speaks through the prophet, and God tells us exactly what his Son, Jesus Christ, will do when he finally comes to earth. Isaiah 53 is a prophecy about Jesus. Through Isaiah the LORD tells us that Jesus is going to make the ultimate sacrifice to redeem his people.

The verses we are studying this morning are a continuation of the well-known words in Isaiah 53, where the prophet says, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 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. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 4-6). A few chapters earlier Isaiah introduces this person he calls "the suffering servant," and he speaks about all the things God's suffering servant will do for his people. The suffering servant is Jesus, and Isaiah is speaking about all the things Jesus will do 750 years before they ever happened.

But why does God send his suffering servant in the first place? Because each of us needs a Savior and a Substitute to step into our shoes, pay for our sins, die our death, and redeem us from the curse of sin. Think about the reality of our earthly existence. You and I were conceived and born under a death sentence. From the instant I was conceived the clock started ticking until the day when my earthly existence would end in death. There is nothing I can do to stop it. There is nothing I can do to change the inevitable march of time. The same Prophet Isaiah says, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2). That's what our sins do; they drive a wedge between us and our Maker. Our disobedience and rebellion build an insurmountable wall of separation between us and God, and there's nothing we can do to remove it. Then, when our time on earth is up, and death claims us, our existence doesn't end. Then comes the judgment. Scripture says, "A man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). If the separation between us and God is not resolved during the time we're here on earth, then the separation between us and God will continue for eternity. That's what hell is: it's the natural consequence of sin that results in being separated from God for all eternity.

That is the problem God's suffering servant came to fix. He came to remove the barrier between us and God. He came to reconcile us to God, that is, to make peace between human beings and God. The suffering servant steps into our place and becomes our stand-in. He takes upon himself the fiery punishment that we have earned by our sins. Isaiah says, "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 her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (v. 7). The suffering servant is Jesus. 700 years before Jesus is born, Isaiah prophesies what Jesus would do. "*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.*"

Here's the deal that God makes: For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son (John 3:16). It's a one-sided deal. God does it all. He loves you and he does everything necessary to save you long before you are even a twinkle in your mother's eye. Long before you and I were ever conceived and born, God laid your sins upon Jesus and crushed him under their burden. Long before you and I were conceived and born God made Jesus' life a guilt offering—not for his own guilt but for my guilt and yours. When Jesus was stripped and flogged and nailed to the cross outside Jerusalem, he made atonement for our sins. He paid for them to satisfy our debt. God's suffering servant is God's own Son, and God's own Son washed away our guilt with his precious blood. It was all for you. It was all for me. It was all for free!

We want to rest in this precious truth. Not long ago someone commented to me, "I hope God forgives me for some of the things I've done." Do you ever feel that way? We wonder if we really are forgiven, if forgiveness really is free? We need to hold onto God's certain promise. When Jesus was crushed for the sin of the world, he didn't forget me, and he didn't miss you!

But Isaiah doesn't stop with the suffering servant's sacrifice. He goes on: "*After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied*" (v. 11a). That's precisely what happened. Jesus promised that he would lay down his life for his sheep, and then he would take it up again—and that's exactly what he did. On the third day, Jesus rose again from the dead. By raising Jesus from the dead, the Father showed that Jesus' sacrifice was complete and accepted. Isaiah puts it this way, "*by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities*" (v. 11b). By overcoming death Jesus tells the world that he has removed the death sentence. God says the same thing through the Apostle Paul, when he inspired him to write, "[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

And then Isaiah wraps up with a summary of the suffering servant's victory: "*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, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors*" (v. 12). God says the same thing through the Apostle Paul: "Therefore God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). Because Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for the sin of the world, God has now exalted Jesus to the highest place. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:15-20, selected verses). Jesus wins! He is victorious over death. He is victorious over Satan. He rules over the universe. He works out all things for his glory and for the good of his Church. He does it all for you. He does it all for me. He does it all for free!

We're talking today about Jesus' sacrifice for us, and it would be really simplistic to make this application: Look at what Jesus did for you. See, he made the ultimate sacrifice, so now you go out and do what you should do to be self-sacrificing. You make your sacrifices for him. That would see Jesus as an inspiration and an example and a role-model that we should emulate and imitate—and that he is—but Jesus is so much more. First of all, any sacrificial love we show to others cannot begin to compare to Jesus' love for you and me. Second, any sacrifice we make for others cannot begin to compare to the infinite sacrifice Jesus make for you and me. Any love we share, any sacrifice we make is only a poor imitation in comparison to everything God has done for you and me in his Son Jesus. Nothing we do can repay him. Nothing we do can make him love us more. Nothing we do can change what he has done for us.

But we can thank him. The reason we can thank him is because in addition to giving us his Son for our forgiveness, God has given us his Spirit. God's Spirit lives in you and fills you. He has made your body his temple. He has made your lips his mouthpiece. He has made your hands his instruments to serve others in his name. This is the wonderful privilege God has given you, that he lives in you and makes your body his dwelling place and works through you. We talk about how God makes his love known in the world, and often he makes his love known through you. You are a follower of Christ, and that means that you are the face of God wherever you live and wherever you serve. You are God's instrument when someone insults you and instead of returning insult for insult, you sacrifice your pride and respond with a word of gentleness and kindness to diffuse the situation. You are God's instrument when someone is going through a difficult time, and you sacrificially take the time to listen to them and talk with them and encourage them with God's love and forgiveness. You are God's instrument in so many little ways that might seem unimportant in the moment: generous gifts of time, generous offerings of love, sacrificial acts of kindness. (Jesus says that whoever gives just a cup of cold water in his name will not lose his reward.) You offer your whole body and your whole life as a living sacrifice to say, "Thank you, Jesus! I love you, Jesus!" You do it because the Spirit that lives in you reminds you again and again of his cross and his empty tomb, and we recall with love and thanksgiving: it was all for me. It was all for free. Amen.